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Shelburne Essays

By

Paul Elmer More

Fourth Series

Ὅσα γὰρ προεγράφη, εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν διδασκαλίαν ἐγράφη, ἵνα διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως τῶν γραφῶν τὴν ἐλπίδα ἔχωμεν.

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BY

PAUL ELMER MORE

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ADVERTISEMENT

The first of these essays was written for the *International Quarterly*. Those on Franklin and *Paradise Lost* appeared in the *Independent*. All the others are taken from the literary pages of the New York *Evening Post*. In several cases a good deal of new matter has been added for the present publication.

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SHELBURNE ESSAYS

FOURTH SERIES

THE VICAR OF MORWENSTOW

Some thirty years ago, in 1875 to be exact, that unstable compound, the English Church, was shocked by the news that a Cornish clergyman, dying away from home, had received the sacraments from the hands of a Roman priest. Over the head of his young wife, who had summoned the ministrant to his bedside, there was poured a bitter stream of controversy, as was the wont of the Establishment in those days; and the storm was not allayed by the publication a few months later of a somewhat irresponsible biography of the apostate by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould. It was then seen that this deathbed conversion was only the last act of a life crammed with eccentricities, and from that day to this the Vicar of Morwenstow has enjoyed a kind of pre-eminence in curiosity. At last his son-in law, Mr. C. E. Byles, has collected his scattered prose and verse in two attractive volumes, and has added to these a full and accurate record of

his life.[1] There is no doubt as to the value of the result. Hawker cannot by any stretch of courtesy be called quite a great writer, but I do not hesitate to say that the works and biography together bring us acquainted with one of the most original and most interesting personalities of the past century. He is likely to be remembered longer than some who have achieved more as artists.

And if he cannot be ranked among the great, at least his writings, long before Mr. Baring-Gould made him a subject of romance, had attained an anomalous celebrity. One of his curious methods of reaching the public was to print off a poem in the form of leaflets, which he then inclosed, like advertisements, in business and friendly letters. In this way and through other obscure channels of publication, some of his poems attained a kind of life apart from their author. They even received the dubious praise of being imitated and stolen, and his best work had a humourous trick of gaining currency as anonymous and ancient folklore. His *Sir Beville*

[1] *Footprints of Former Men in Far Cornwall.* By R. S. Hawker. New York: John Lane, 1903.

Cornish Ballads and Other Poems. By R. S. Hawker. John Lane, 1904.

The Life and Letters of R. S. Hawker (Sometime Vicar of Morwenstow). By his Son-in-law, C. E. Byles. John Lane, 1905.

was included in Major Egerton Leigh's *Ballads and Legends of Cheshire*, published in 1867, where it was described as "A Royalist song found amongst the family papers in an old oak chest, at Erdeswick Hall, one of the seats of the Minshull family." Nor was this a solitary instance. Most notable of all was the fortune of his *Song of the Western Men*, which, as the ballad that has raised the loudest discussion, may here be quoted entire:

A good sword and a trusty hand!
A merry heart and true!
King James's men shall understand
What Cornish lads can do!

And have they fixed the where and when?
And shall Trelawny die?
Here's twenty thousand Cornish men
Will know the reason why!

Out spake their Captain brave and bold:
A merry wight was he:—
"If London Tower were Michael's hold,
We'd set Trelawny free!

"We'll cross the Tamar, land to land:
The Severn is no stay:
With 'one and all,' and hand in hand;
And who shall bid us nay?

"And when we come to London Wall,
A pleasant sight to view,
Come forth! come forth! ye cowards all:
Here's men as good as you."

> **Trelawny he 's in keep and hold :**
> *Trelawny he may die :*
> *But here's twenty thousand Cornish bold*
> *Will know the reason why !*

The stanzas were first published by Hawker anonymously in a provincial newspaper, when he was twenty-three. With the exception of the italicised refrain, which is traditional and was supposed by Hawker to allude to Sir Jonathan Trelawny, one of the seven Bishops imprisoned by James II., the poem is entirely original. Yet so well had it caught the popular vein that it soon passed for an ancient ballad. Mr. Davies Gilbert, President of the Royal Society of London, had it printed as such on a broadside ; Sir Walter Scott, in a note to his own poems, wrote of it as "a curious and spirited specimen" of the popular ballad; and Macaulay, in his *History of England*, used it as an indication of the feeling in Cornwall during the trial of the bishops. It has since been discovered that Hawker himself was partly mistaken, and that the refrain alludes to an earlier Trelawny than the persecuted Churchman; but that is small matter. No wonder that the author contemplated his ravished honours with some jealousy. "All these years," he exclaimed bitterly, "the Song has been bought and sold, set to music and applauded, while I have lived on among these far-away rocks unprofited, unpraised, and unknown. This is an epitome of my whole life. Others have drawn profit from my brain, while

I have been coolly relinquished to obscurity and unrequital and neglect."

And as with his works, so with the man. For years before his death people who had scarcely heard the name of Robert Stephen Hawker knew vaguely of the strange Vicar of Morwenstow, and associated his oddities with the wonders of the West Country. Visitors to Devonshire and the Duchy of Cornwall turned aside, as did Tennyson on a memorable occasion, from the haunts of King Arthur and the relics of a thousand superstitions to break bread with the lonely parson whose life was absorbed in the spirit of the land. And what a land! Beauty and terror there divide the scene between them, and the recollections of saint and human fiend jostle each other for possession. There is Kynance Cove, on the Lizard, which Swinburne, in his exaggerated way, thinks the most incomparably lovely spot in the world. Here one may follow up some river valley of many-changing charms till suddenly he comes out on the wide, rocky moors, whose vastness seems more lonely than the sea, and whose mysteries have wrought an indescribable fear in the minds of men. Barely a score of miles west of Morwenstow, on the north coast, rises the stern headland of Tintagel (or Dundagel; it is spelt in many ways), which fame has made the birthplace of Arthur, and hallowed and saddened with the loves of Tristram and Iseult and King Mark. It may almost be called the Bethlehem of Ro-

mance. One approaches it to-day through a dark ravine that drops precipitously to the sea ; and standing on the shore, one looks up and sees that the great cliff on the left has been rent asunder, how long ago cannot be told, leaving a chasm between the two ruined castles, in one of which Ygerne shut herself up against the guilty passion of Uther Pendragon, but in vain. Through that riven gate the wet wind rises and the sound of waves that are said never to be still ; and one thinks of Hawker's noble image :

> There stood Dundagel, throned : and the great sea
> Lay, a strong vassal at his master's gate,
> And, like a drunken giant, sobb'd in sleep!

Or, if the mood of the waters is more boisterous, it may be that Swinburne's swinging lines break on the memory, as he describes the carrying of Iseult, with the fire of the magic potion already in her veins, up the steep path, while King Mark and his knights cluster before the walls and look down on the climbing procession:

> So with loud joy and storm of festival
> They brought the bride in up the towery way
> That rose against the rising front of day,
> Stair based on stair, between the rocks unhewn,
> To those strange halls wherethrough the tidal tune
> Rang loud or lower from soft or strengthening sea,
> Tower shouldering tower, to windward and to lee,
> With change of floors and stories, flight on flight,
> That clomb and curled up to the crowning height

Whence men might see wide east and west in one
And on one sea waned moon and mounting sun.
And severed from the sea-rock's base, where stand
Some worn walls yet, they saw the broken strand,
The beachless cliff that in the sheer sea dips,
The sleepless shore inexorable to ships,
And the straight causeway's bare gaunt spine between
The sea-spanned walls and naked mainland's green.

Inland from Tintagel, over the Camel River, stands Slaughter Bridge, where, according to tradition, Arthur was defeated in that great battle of the West, and where he got his death wound. Further on lies Dozmaré Pool, in the desolate moorland. Here it was that the King, wandering with Merlin, beheld an arm clothed in white samite rise out of the water, and in the hand the mystical sword Excalibur. And down to this same lake came Sir Bedivere from his stricken lord and cast the blade from him; and afterward appeared the barge bearing the three Queens, and wafted the dying man to his rest. It is not hard for a lover of poetry who stands on that shore when the homeless breeze is astir, to hear in imagination the cry that issued from the boat, breaking into—

an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

But to the unlettered moormen the wailing of the storm is more likely to sound like the anguish of

a certain John Tregeagle of infamous memory, whose ghost, for an ancient, cruel sin, is compelled forever to bale the water of Dozmaré with a pierced limpet shell; while Satan himself lurks among the reeds and leaps, roaring, upon him if for a moment he slackens in his task. The country is haunted with these weary *revenants* who keep alive the memory of old wrongs, and not a few of Hawker's poems are a retelling of the local legends of this sort.

It is natural that those who travelled thither to gather up the traditions of the land should have included the little hamlet of Morwenstow in their pilgrimage. Tennyson, as I have said, did so in 1848, when he was working at his *Idyls of the King*, and he has left in his journal this brief record of the visit: "June 2nd —Took a gig to Rev. S. Hawker at Morwenstow, passing Comb valley; fine view over sea; coldest manner of Vicar until I told my name, then all heartiness. Walk on cliff with him; told of shipwreck." The note is brief and dry, as befits a great man writing of a lesser—lesser, although to some there is a note in Hawker's poem on the Sangraal which almost compensates for Tennyson's art and his finer graces of the spirit. But the solitary parson made more of the occasion and wrote out in his notebook one of the most graphic accounts of the Laureate that we possess. The passage is too long to repeat in full, but part of it may serve as an example of

the talent lavished by Hawker on letters and memoranda that have reached the public only by accident:

I found my guest at his entrance a tall swarthy Spanish-looking man, with an eye like a sword. He sate down and we conversed. I at once found myself with no common mind. All poetry in particular he seemed to use like household words, and as chance led to the mention of Homer's picture of night he gave at once a rendering simple and fine. "When the Sky is broken up and the myriad Stars roll down, and the Shepherd's heart is glad." It struck me that the trite translation was about the reverse motion of this. We then talked about Cornwall and King Arthur, *my* themes, and I quoted Tennyson's fine acct. of the restoration of Excalibur to the Lake. . . . [Follows the dialogue through which the poet's name was revealed to the host, and then] We went on our way to the rocks, and if the converse could all be written down it would make, I think, as nice a little book as Charlotte Elizabeth [Mrs. Hawker] could herself have composed. All verses—all lands—the secret history of many of his poems, which I may not reveal—but that which I can lawfully relate I will. We talked of the sea, which he and I equally adore. But as he told me strange to say Wordsworth cannot bear its face. My solution was, that nursed among the still waters with a mind as calm and equable as his lakes the Scenery of the rough Places might be too boisterous for the meek man's Soul. He agreed. We discussed *ποντίων τε Κυμάτων*, etc., and I was glad to find that he half agreed with a thought I have long cherished, that these words relate to the *Ear* and not to the *Eye*. [De Quincey, apparently unknown to Hawker, had expressed the same fancy, and elsewhere Hawker finds confirmation of it in a line of Catullus.]

He did not disdain a version of mine made long ago:—

"Hark how old Ocean laughs with all his Waves."

Then, seated on the brow of the Cliff, with Dundagel full in sight, he revealed to me the purpose of his journey to the West. . . .

I lent him Books and MSS. about King Arthur, which he carried off, and which I perhaps shall never see again. Then evening fell. He arose to go; and I agreed to drive him on his way. He demanded a pipe, and produced a package of very common shag. By great good luck my Sexton had about him his own short black dudheen, which accordingly the minstrel filled and fired. Wild language occupied the way, until we shook farewell at Combe. This, said Tennyson, has indeed been a day to be remembered, at least it is one which I shall never again forget. The Bard is a handsome well-formed man and tall, more like a Spaniard than an Englishman —black, long elflocks all round his face, mid which his eyes not only shine but glare. His garments loose and full, such as Bard beseems, and over all a large dark Spanish Cloak. He speaks the languages both old and new, and has manifestly a most bibliothec memory. His voice is very deep, tuneful and slow—an organ, not a breath. His temper, which I tried, seemed very calm —His spirits very low. When I quoted "My May of Life" [?] and again, "O never more on me," etc., he said they too were his haunting words.

All which may seem to concern Tennyson rather than the subject of this sketch, but there is a fascination in these meetings of the poets which always tempts one to linger; some breath of larger life blows from them to us, and for the

time makes us of their company. It is easy to imagine ourselves visiting the same reliques of the romantic past, and turning aside with Tennyson to Morwenstow. Hedges line the road on either side, and it has been observed that every bush is bent away from the sea, so steady and ruthless are the landward winds. There are no groves save a plantation at the chapel, and here every tree crouches imploringly from the same gales. We may, perhaps, find the Vicar in his glebe, which, as he himself has described it, occupies a position of wild and singular beauty; its western boundary is the sea, skirted by tall and tremendous cliffs, and near this brink, with the exquisite taste of ecclesiastical antiquity, is placed the church. Chapel and glebe and parsonage, after the ancient Celtic tradition, lie alone and separated from the hamlet they serve. Despite the "coldest manner" noted by Tennyson, the Vicar, when his suspicions were not aroused, had usually a hearty welcome for strangers, even an awkward eagerness such as grows on one who is much isolated. He stands erect in the field overseeing the care of his garden or flocks, a tall, sturdy figure in striking garb. He is blond with weather-beaten cheeks, and long, light hair, which, in later life, turns white. The head is intellectual, but the eyes, to judge from the portraits, lack concentration, and there is a kind of pudginess about the mouth and chin, the result, it may be, of his habit of taking opium. At a d stance he might

be thought a venerable old lady. He wears over all, perhaps, a yellow vestment made of a poncho, and beneath it a reddish-brown cassock; "a blushing brown," he once said, "was the hue of Our Lady's hair, as typified in the stem of the maiden-hair fern." Or, possibly, the cassock has been supplanted by a long purple coat. Under this is a fisherman's blue jersey, as befits a fisher of men; and a small red cross marks the spot where the spear entered the Saviour's side. A carpenter's pencil, betokening the life at Nazareth, dangles from his button-hole, and besides this he is adorned with a medal of gold struck in honour of the promulgation, in 1854, of the Immaculate Conception. His trousers are of some odd colour, navy blue or red brown; black he utterly eschews, and has stipulated that even in death he shall be covered with a purple pall. Crimson gloves cover his hands (he kept them on even in church), and loose Hessian boots rise from his feet. His hat is the fez of a Greek priest or, by way of alternation, a broad-brimmed felt of the favourite reddish-brown. The "pastoral staff" is cross-handled to complete the symbolism of his habiliments.

The costume is unusual, to say the least, but let a man beware how he shows surprise and, above all, let him avoid comment; for our mild-looking parson has a nimble wit and a cutting tongue. More than one patronising stranger has departed from this provincial nook utterly non-

plussed and chop-fallen. If you are yourself clad in dignified black, and especially if you are a dissenting clergyman, it may be as well to gaze and pass on without salutation. One innocent guest was regaled by Hawker with the story of a preceding visitor who for his unlucky garb had been pinned to the earth by the Vicar's pet stag Robin. "This Evangelical," said Hawker, "had a tail-coat; he was dressed like an undertaker, sir. Once upon a time there was one like him travelling in Egypt, with a similar coat and a tall hat; and the Arabs pursued him, calling him the 'father of saucepans, with a slit-tail.'" The guest to whom the story was told wore a like garment, and found the situation somewhat embarrassing.

The tame stag, with its proper hatred of Evangelicals, was not the only odd pet that made favour in the Vicar's eyes. At one time he was attended everywhere by an intelligent black pig, and it is as like as not we shall meet him in his glebe surrounded by a dog and nine or ten cats. Both dog and cats are so indulged that they accompany him to church and circle about him while he performs the divine office. There is altogether something uncanny in the familiarity between this man and the wild beasts of earth and air. "Beans and peas," he once wrote, "are interdicted by the Jackdaws. We have sown twice, and twice they have devoured them all. And a Scarecrow put up by my old Man, was so

made up in my hat and broken Cassock that they took it for me, and came around it, looking up to be fed." All that we learn about him confirms this impression of his almost mythical attachment to the soil, and if we talk with him we shall discover his mind to be a veritable storehouse of Cornish history and legend.

Yet, as a matter of fact, he was not native to the Duchy, but was born, in 1803, at Plymouth, in the neighbouring county of Devon. Even as a boy he made himself notorious for his droll pranks and practical jokes. For several years he attended the Cheltenham Grammar School at the expense of an aunt, and while there published his first book of poems, *Tendrils, by Reuben*. Later in life he could not even recall the name of this early venture. At the age of nineteen he was matriculated at Pembroke College, Oxford, and took his B.A. degree five years later. As a scholar he seems not to have risen much above the average, though he won the Newdigate with a poem on *Pompeii*. The most notorious escapade of his college career was his marriage, which, even without the embellishments added by Mr. Baring-Gould, was singular enough. His father had been a physician, but had abandoned the profession for holy orders and was incumbent of the living at Stratton, not far from Morwenstow. Robert had become acquainted with the family of Colonel Wrey I'ans, who dwelt in the neighbourhood of this place, and in 1823 he mar-

ried one of the daughters, Charlotte. The bride, whom he carried back with him to Oxford, was forty-one, while he was still under twenty; but the union turned out to be unusually happy. He was until her death, in 1863 at the age of eighty, a kind and devoted husband. During her last illness he gave much of his time to reading aloud to her, and it is said that after going through a three-volume novel so great was his abstraction that he knew no more of the book than if he had never seen it. Her loss left him in a state of pathetic loneliness and depression, but he soon found consolation. In something less than two years he took to himself a new wife, a Miss Pauline Kuczynski, the daughter of a Polish exile and an Englishwoman. As if to balance the disparity of the first marriage, the groom was now sixty-one and the bride only twenty; yet again the venture proved in every way fortunate.

But this is to anticipate. On leaving Oxford Hawker was appointed to the curacy of North Tamerton, and after a brief period was removed to Morwenstow, where he resided for forty years, seldom crossing the boundary of his parish during all that time. He became, as it were, the *genius loci*, in whom the spirit of the valley and sea found expression. The very towns of Cornwall near by seemed to him remote and set in some unvisited province of the world. "No one can even imagine the horror it is to me," he once wrote to a friend, after a residence of twenty-eight

years, "to look forward to the journey from hence to Stratton to attend the Confirmation. The streets, the strange faces, the unusual crowd —the Salutations in the market-place are to me, a shy, nervous man, an actual trial and a burthen to bear. When I had to attend at the Archdeacon's Visitation at Launceston, twenty-five miles off, every year, I could not sleep for long nights before, and the faint and sickening sensation I felt at the aspect of the Town was humiliating and depressing indeed." It was one of the whims of a more eccentric power than himself that he should after all have died away from home. Morwenstow had not hitherto enjoyed a resident vicar for a century, and Hawker found the church dilapidated, and the people, rude and ignorant peasants and seamen for the most part, unattached. He set himself diligently to right these conditions, and by persistence and a kind of rough wisdom succeeded. To restore the church, whose legendary history appealed to his fancy, he drew heavily on the small fortune of his wife, laying up for himself endless debts and difficulties in the future. He also built a vicarage, in which he did not fail to embody some of his own original notions. "The kitchen chimney," he explained, "perplexed me very much, till I bethought me of my mother's tomb; and there it is, in its exact shape and dimensions." His yearly revenue was £365, as he announced in an inscription placed over the front door:

A House, a Glebe, a Pound a Day;
A Pleasant Place to Watch and Pray.
Be true to Church—Be kind to Poor,
O Minister! forevermore.

In the solitude of this haunted land his mind brooded on its own fancies until the actual and the visionary lost their sharp distinction for him. Probably the habit of opium-taking strengthened the reality of this dream-world. As a consequence, in dealing with him it is always difficult to know what should be attributed to religion and what belongs to superstition and pure charlatanry. When he wrote of Joseph of Arimathea's Syrian home those two perfect lines,—

Young men, that no one knew, went in and out,
With a far look in their eternal eyes,

he was merely repeating what he held to be his own experience. So real would he have these angelic visitants to be that he impressed on children's minds the fact that they were wrongly depicted with wings. It is easy, in dealing with such a character, to write down the word dupe or hypocrite, but who shall presume to draw the boundary between these morbid states and the profounder conviction of celestial communion? And has not the least religious of poets said it, *Et sunt commercia cæli?*[1]

[1] In the year 1895 Lionel Johnson wrote this sonnet on *Hawker of Morwenstow*, alluding to his death-bed conversion and to his visionary life:

In other matters his supernaturalism assumed a grosser form. He had charms for the evil eye and for inflictions of the body. He recognised a witch by the five black spots placed diagonally under her tongue, like those made in the feet of the swine by the entrance of the devils at Gadara. Elemental demons and emissaries of Satan beset his path, and it is not unusual to come upon such a note as this in his letters: "As I entered the Gulph between the Vallies to-day, a Storm leaped from the Sea and rushed at me roaring—I recognised a Demon and put Carrow into a gallop and so escaped. But it was perilous work. There once I saw a Brownie; and Thence at Night the Northern Glances Gleam." He had a philosophy for these apparitions and conceived a medium midway between matter and

"Strong Shepherd of thy sheep, pasturers of the sea;
Far on the Western marge, thy passionate Cornish land!
Oh, that from out thy Paradise thou could'st thine hand
Reach forth to mine, and I might tell my love to thee!
For one the faith, and one the joy, of thee and me,
Catholic faith and Celtic joy: I understand
Somewhat, I too, the Messengers from Sion strand;
The voices and the visions of the Mystery.

Ah, not the Chaunt alone was thine: thine too the Quest!
And at the last the Sangraal of the Paschal Christ
Flashed down its fair red Glory to those dying eyes:
They closed in death, and opened on the Victim's Breast.
Now, while they look for ever on the Sacrificed,
Remember, how thine ancient race in twilight lies!"

spirit for which he coined the outlandish name of "Numyne." This was nothing less than the "sacramental element of the Shechinah," the "Mater et Filia Dei" of the Rabbins, the "atmosphere of the angels," a blend of God and man, and a dozen other quaint conceptions jumbled together from the luminiferous ether of science and the *aura animæ* of the mediæval schoolmen. Yet if he could be solemn over his beliefs one moment, he could treat them as a jest the next. He is known to have pointed out with apparent seriousness the haunt of mermaids to a stranger, but Mr. Baring-Gould also tells how, when a young man, he decked himself in seaweeds and an oilskin wrap and, so disguised, sat on a rock in the moonlight and sang, to the great wonderment of the neighbourhood. Undoubtedly there was not a little of this deliberate attempt at mystification in the minor eccentricities of the reverend gentleman, and Superstition entwined herself cunningly with Charlatanry, as is the custom with those foster sisters.

It is not to be supposed that any great and accomplished work should proceed from such a life and character. He was, indeed, not without natural ambition, and in his youth had made a brave effort to imitate Byron and other reigning favourites of the day. But as time slipped by and he became more and more involved in the cares and solitudes of his parish, he realised with some bitterness that the race of fame was not for him.

His letters contain pathetic allusions to the innumerable memorandum books into which he had poured his scattered thoughts and which he hoped might one day be "read and printed as 'the Fragments of a broken mind.'" The phrase evidently flattered his vanity, and came up for use more than once; it had occurred in a lyric written as early as 1840:

> All, all is gone—no longer roll
> Vision and dream around my soul:
> But, in their stead, float down the wind
> These fragments of a broken mind.

And in the noblest of his poems he put into the mouth of King Arthur the expression of his own futile doom, mingled with laments for an erring land. Had he always, or often, written as magnificently as this, there would be no need to make allowance for his shortcomings:

> Ha! Sirs—ye seek a noble crest to-day,
> To win and wear the starry Sangraal,
> The link that binds to God a lonely land.
> Would that my arm went with you, like my heart!
> But the true shepherd must not shun the fold:
> For in this flock are crouching grievous wolves,
> And chief among them all, my own false kin.
> Therefore I tarry by the cruel sea,
> To hear at eve the treacherous mermaid's song,
> And watch the wallowing monsters of the wave,—
> 'Mid all things fierce, and wild, and strange, alone!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Ah! native Cornwall! throned upon the hills,
> Thy moorland pathways worn by Angel feet,

Thy streams that march in music to the sea
'Mid Ocean's merry noise, his billowy laugh!
Ah me! a gloom falls heavy on my soul—
The birds that sung to me in youth are dead;
I think, in dreamy vigils of the night,
It may be God is angry with my land,
Too much athirst for fame, too fond of blood;
And all for earth, for shadows, and the dream
To glean an echo from the winds of song!

It is the cry of a man who feels his powers caught in some spell of impotence, who knows there are great things to do and great labourers starting for the field, while he lingers behind in a lesser duty and a lonelier dream. But his worst fear was baseless:

I would not be forgotten in this land.

No; as that strange West Country is trodden into conformity with the routine of civilisation, he is likely to become better and more distinctly known as the personification of a semi-mythical past. No other writer can supplant him. For we must recognise that there are two kinds of poetical genius, the essential and the contingent, and that their claims on our memory are as diverse as their faculties. Nor is this division quite coterminous with that into major and minor poets. Keats and Wordsworth both belong to the major group, yet one is essentially, whereas the other is in large measure contingently, poetic. We judge the work of Keats in itself, and its value rises or sinks purely in proportion to its own intrinsic interest; it would be almost the

same to us if we had never heard the writer's name. On the contrary, no small portion of Wordsworth's verse, and that not always the least cherished, derives its weight and significance from what we know of the poet's own character and of his philosophy. It is the voice of the High Priest of Nature to which we are listening, and behind his words is the authority of a grave teacher. Take away the memory of that systematic life with its associations, forget the hallowed beauty of the Lake Country, and how much of Wordsworth's celebrity would be annulled! Now it is just these contingent qualities that render even the minor verse of our Cornish Vicar precious. You may read his book of poems alone with comparative coldness; but first go through Mr. Byles's admirable but rather bulky memoir, read Hawker's own prose sketches, steep your mind in the history and topography of Cornwall, and then turn once more to the poetry. The difference of its effect will be startling.

A specific example will make clear what is meant by the contingent interest of Hawker's work. One of his shorter ballads is founded on the story told him of the death of a noted wrecker, Mawgan of Melhuach:

> 'T was a fierce night when old Mawgan died,
> Men shuddered to hear the rolling tide:
> The wreckers fled fast from the awful shore,
> They had heard strange voices amid the roar.

"Out with the boat there," some one cried,—
"Will he never come? We shall lose the tide:
His berth is trim and his cabin stored,
He 's a weary long time coming on board."

The old man struggled upon the bed:
He knew the words that the voices said;
Wildly he shriek'd as his eyes grew dim,
"He was dead! he was dead! when I buried him."

Hark yet again to the devilish roar!
"He was nimble once with a ship on shore;
Come! come! old man, 't is a vain delay,
We must make the offing by break of day."

Hard was the struggle, but at the last,
With a stormy pang old Mawgan pass'd,
And away, away, beneath their sight,
Gleam'd the red sail at pitch of night.

The workmanship of the piece is sufficiently good, and if read without preparation it might pass as a fair specimen of the school which produced Southey's *Old Woman of Berkeley* and a host of similar ballads of the time. Like Southey's work, it cannot be classed with such a poem as Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which depends for its effect on emotions that lurk in every human breast and hence requires no realism behind its supernatural imagery; but, when properly considered, it also differs as radically from the spurious school which it seems to resemble. Southey's lines are clever and catch the fancy, and nothing more; they have no background of real terror. On the contrary, the full

effect of Hawker's ballad is to be got by reading it repeatedly and lingeringly, and by allowing the memories of the poet's own experiences to blend with the impression of the verse. Gradually, as at the sound of a spell, the memories of the sea about those pitiless coasts arise in the mind. We recall the legends of great storms and terrible wrecks from the days of the Spanish Armada to the present, and the wild life of the Western men, which had not wholly ceased in Hawker's own time. So constant is the peril of the ocean that even to-day a child in these towns is rebuked if he brings to the table a loaf of bread resting on its cut side—it looks too much like a vessel floating bottom upwards. But if the waves take away, they also restore, and the history of that coast is a long record of heroic fighting with England's enemies and of no less ruthless smuggling and wrecking. In one of the chapters of his *Footprints in Far Cornwall*, Hawker relates with extraordinary vividness his own labours in taming the habits of these wreckers, who did not scruple to allure vessels on the rocks with false lights. It was reckoned an omen of ill-luck to restore life to the bodies washed ashore, as he once learned emphatically from his own servant; and horrible tales were abroad of occasions when the murderous waves were not swift enough in their work for these ghouls of the sea. To be awakened at midnight when the wind was screeching like a lost soul, to clamber down the

precipitous cliff some three hundred feet with the spray lashing about him, to labour in the surf for the rescue of a forlorn ship, was an adventure that tried the nerves and troubled the imagination. Too often only the lifeless bodies came to his hands, but these at least he saved from desecration and buried with decent ceremony.

There had been more than one Mawgan in his parish. Just before Hawker's time a stranger, whose origin and end were wrapped in obscurity, gained the sobriquet of "Cruel Coppinger" for his lawless practices. His life and mysterious disappearance furnished Hawker with one of his best prose sketches, and the same character figures in Mr. Baring-Gould's *In the Roar of the Sea*. Still more like the fate of Mawgan was the story sent to the *Times* by a resident of the district during Hawker's incumbency. The storms had been unusually severe, and one night a cloud filled with a fiery glow was seen by many of the sailors gliding up the valley to the house of a notorious merchant and wrecker, and passing inland along the glen until it reached a church where his family lay buried. Hawker himself half, or wholly, believed the tale, and it evidently impressed him deeply. His own knowledge of the event he writes in a letter :

> On Sunday evening this day week ——— went out on the cliffs, and was seen watching the sea, it is supposed for Wreck. He returned quite well and went to bed. At 5 in the morning his Servants heard him walk about

his room. Then his footsteps ceased. He had returned to bed. At Six O'Clock a vast roll of the tide came up the Harbour, and one of his Vessels broke loose. The Servants went up to tell him—knocked—no answer—again—silence—frightened, they went in, and there he lay quite dead, His head upon his hand. Ever since that day it is certain the storms have been continual—again and again with violence, and while I now write my Table trembles with the wind. All this is awful. The Enemy of Man, you know, is called the Prince of the Powers of the Air.

But it was something more than superstition that supported the Vicar in his long years of tribulation. Above all these wandering fires glowed the steady light of faith, and he is one of that succession of clergymen, beginning with the saintly George Herbert, who from the heart of their isolated parishes have enriched English poetry with a body of pure and high meditation. I do not know how it may be with others, but with me the knowledge of Hawker's faithful service, and of the ancient traditions of Celtic and Saxon saints amidst which he lived, lends a peculiar charm to stanzas that might otherwise appear almost commonplace. I discover this charm in such lines as these :

> Come, then, sad river, let our footsteps blend
> Onward, by silent bank, and nameless stone :
> Our years began alike, so let them end,—
> We live with many men, we die alone ;—

and I find something quite different from the familiar cant of piety in his poem to *Morwennæ*

Statio, that is, as he interprets with quaint pedantry, "The Stow, or the Place, of St. Morwenna; hence the *Breviate, hodie, Morwenstow*":

My Saxon shrine! the only ground
Wherein this weary heart hath rest:
What years the birds of God have found
Along thy walls their sacred nest!
The storm—the blast—the tempest shock
Have beat upon those walls in vain;
She stands—a daughter of the rock—
The changeless God's eternal fane.

. . . . . .

Huge, mighty, massive, hard, and strong,
Were the choice stones they lifted then:
The vision of their hope was long,
They knew their God, those faithful men.
They pitch'd no tent for change or death,
No home to last man's shadowy day;
There! there! the everlasting breath,
Would breathe whole centuries away.

See now, along that pillar'd aisle,
The graven arches, firm and fair:
They bend their shoulders to the toil,
And lift the hollow roof in air.
A sign! beneath the ship we stand,
The inverted vessel's arching side;
Forsaken—when the fisher-band
Went forth to sweep a mightier tide.

Pace we the ground! our footsteps tread
A cross—the builder's holiest form:
That awful couch, where once was shed
The blood, with man's forgiveness warm.

And here, just where His mighty breast
Throbb'd the last agony away,
They bade the voice of worship rest,
And white-robed Levites pause and pray.

. . . . . .

How all things glow with life and thought,
Where'er our faithful fathers trod!
The very ground with speech is fraught,
The air is eloquent of God.
In vain would doubt or mockery hide
The buried echoes of the past;
A voice of strength, a voice of pride,
Here dwells amid the storm and blast.

To understand Hawker's solemn reverence for the temple and saint which he served, one must go back to the days of the early Celtic domination. It was the custom then for a holy man to choose some bit of land, or llan, and there fast and pray for forty days as a sign of possession. After that the sacred precinct was his forever; he did not pass away, but abode as the guardian and owner of the edifice which might be erected to his name. To a man of Hawker's imaginative temperament, the patron of his church was a living presence, listening to the words and following with spirit eyes the acts of his worship. But his attempt to bind the present and the past together in a kind of reverent imitation did not end with his ministrations at the altar. "Cornwall," as it has been said, "was the Thebaid of the Welsh," and the relics of the rude stone cells still exist where these anchorites of the moors dwelt

in solitary contemplation. As a young man, before he had come to Morwenstow, Hawker had, after the manner of these exiled hermits, built himself a perch on the cliff near Whitstone, where he might be alone with his thoughts, and, as he would say solemnly, "with God." And later, again, at Morwenstow, out of the timbers cast up by wrecks, he constructed a hut, from which, looking out over the sea far below, like another Odysseus on his wave-beaten island, he beheld visions of a longed-for home beyond the sunset. One may see a picture of this cell in Mr. Byles's Life—a little chamber half-buried in the side of the steep heathery hill, with a mound of earth over the roof. There is no window or other outlet besides the door which opens seaward —a mere covering from the inclement weather. Here, during the period of his widowhood, Hawker composed that fragment of the work which he had long contemplated, *The Quest of the Sangraal;* and here a friend tells of visiting him one wild evening when the sun had gone down like a ball of red-hot iron into the deep, and of hearing him recite from memory the completed canto.

It is a poem whose power grows upon you with acquaintance, and upon it Hawker's fame as an artist must ultimately hang. So much of his own life is in it that I have already quoted a number of the lines to illustrate the various phases of his character,—the vision of the young men with a far look in their eternal eyes, the

image of the sea sobbing like a drunken giant below Tintagel on its throne, the lament of Arthur abiding at home while his knights went out on the sacred Quest. At the very opening of the poem there is a reminiscence of the old Celtic hermits, not without allusion to the spot where, in imitation of their withdrawal from the world, the poet himself retired for prayer and composition :

> They had their lodges in the wilderness,
> Or built them cells beside the shadowy sea,
> And there they dwelt with angels, like a dream :
> So they unroll'd the volume of the Book,
> And fill'd the fields of the Evangelist
> With antique thoughts, that breath'd of Paradise.

And the subject of the lay—the sending out of the four chief knights to the East and West and North and South in search of the vanished cup—is nothing less than the regeneration which was to come to England when men should once more reverence as in old days the mystic chalice of the Communion. Hawker's work was, in this respect, a part of that awakening of the religious imagination which followed the Tractarian Movement. It belongs to the same sacramentarian impulse which produced *John Inglesant*, although, like Shorthouse, he never identified himself with the armies of High or Low Church, while, unlike Shorthouse, he was, through his reverence of the priestly function, brought at the end into the Roman fold.

But the more inevitable comparison, or contrast, is with that *Idyl of the King* which deals with the same Quest. We have seen Tennyson and Hawker looking out together toward Tintagel and talking over the deeds of the King who issued from that fortress. It is worth while to read in succession the results of their conversation, if only to learn how the poetic pleasure may vary in kind as well as in degree ; the two poems are a notable illustration of that distinction between the essential and the contingent. So far, indeed, is Tennyson's rhapsody of *The Holy Grail* removed from the accessories of time and place and individual experience that to some it may seem to rise perilously near to the inane. Instead of Hawker's account of the knights setting forth from the actual Tintagel, "where gate and bulwark darken o'er the sea," Tennyson carries us to the fantastic hall that Merlin raised at Camelot, with its " four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt With many a mystic symbol." The landscape, from the first description of the " April morn That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke," is in a region that no eye has beheld and no human foot has ever trod. And the sea —it is not on the Severn shores that Lancelot encountered that darkening storm :

> So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
> Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
> Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea

Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.

And as the time and place, so is the action. The popular tradition, or legend, has evaporated into a vision of the poet's own brain which no man ever believed or could believe to be historic. There is not the slightest illusion in the reader's mind that these are real knights who are seeking a vessel supposed somewhere still to be hidden in the earth; it is characteristic of Tennyson's Arthur that he laments the Quest as a kind of ruinous madness sent among his followers, whereas in Hawker's poem he only regrets that he himself is restrained from the holy adventure. Hawker wrote as a Churchman, having his eye on an actual state of England in the past and seeing in prophecy a corresponding regeneration. Place by the side of those farewell lines which I have already quoted from Hawker,

Ha! Sirs—ye seek a noble crest to-day,

these words in which the Arthur of the *Idyls* explains his home-staying and his blindness to the vision. He, too, is a King who cannot leave his allotted field until his work be done,—

but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day
Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,

> This air that smites his forehead is not air
> But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
> In moments when he feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.

Is it not plain that we are here rapt from this earth into the land of the spirit? It is even safe, I think, to say that this song of *The Holy Grail* is the most purely spiritual poem in the language. I would not tarnish its beauty with a clumsy paraphrase of its sense, for, indeed, the value of this mystical music lies entirely in the spontaneous echo stirred in the reader's breast. But clearly it is, in a general way, an expression of that hungering after the ideal which exists in every human being, obscured for the most part by the necessities of the day, and to those even who hearken to its summons speaking so vaguely that all but one or two go out to "follow wandering fires, lost in the quagmire."

There is nothing of this universal meaning in Hawker's lines, and they are little concerned with that inner truth which is essential to the human spirit, although by most of us so dimly perceived. But they have their great compensation. It is not necessary to explain once more how vividly the scenes of that poem reproduce in imagination the particular land in which the poet dwelt, and how perfectly its theme blends together the legendary exploits of King Arthur's

knights with the poet's own religious experience and with the traditions of the church which he served. It is, indeed, not unlikely that many readers will feel more at home in these passing but very tangible moods of religion than in the ethereal vision of Tennyson, whose truth corresponds to no realities of outer life. And if Hawker's language lacks the pure and essential beauty of Tennyson's, there is nevertheless a certain fine sonorousness in his measure, and here and there a verse rings almost with the gravity of *Lycidas*, where Milton in like measure bewails the degeneracy of the land. These may be contingent qualities and may demand for their full enjoyment a special knowledge of the poet's life, but they are genuine and have their precious reward. I have quite failed in this essay if my aim has not been evident to spare the impatient reader as much as possible of this preliminary labour and to shorten the way to his journey's end.

FANNY BURNEY

I LIKE better to begin with this English maiden name, with its pleasant familiarity, than to adopt the stately Madame D'Arblay which stands at the head of Mr. Austin Dobson's superb edition of the *Diary and Letters*.[1] For however much the form of this minute self-revelation may remind us of the famous French diaries, in substance it is singularly English, and on that quality not a little of its interest depends, as well as its very grave defects. There is, too, something incongruous in the very sound of a name which did not belong to the writer until she was forty-one. By a kind of unconscious selection the memory of our great friends and mentors of the

[1] *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (1778–1840)*. As edited by her niece, Charlotte Barrett. With Preface and Notes by Austin Dobson. In six volumes. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904–05.—This is properly a continuation of *The Early Diary of Frances Burney (1768–78), with a Selection from her Correspondence, and from the Journals of her Sisters, Susan and Charlotte Burney*. Edited by Annie Raine Ellis. Two volumes. London, 1889. The eight volumes together thus extend over a period of seventy-three years.

past fixes itself at a certain age, and it is only with an effort that we can picture them to ourselves as younger or older than this arbitrary image. Of Miss Burney's contemporaries, Johnson we always see as grave and wearing the years of authority; can any one honestly say the legend of the young poet and hack writer strolling through Grub Street with a hungry friend has any meaning to him? Walpole remains in the middle years of life with the cynicism on his face that comes when youth has passed and the powers of manhood still remain. But Fanny is a girl to the end. At the close of her Journal we read of her as an old woman, alone in her London house, bending over the mass of papers left by her father and sorting them out with tired fingers, but the story leaves us incredulous. The stiffness of language which has gradually benumbed her style, we take as the pedantry of untried youth, and the face of the writer persists in wearing the mobile features so familiar in the portrait made by her artist cousin.[1] The brow keeps its breadth and smoothness; the eyes still look out with the same mixture of large, quizzical humour and near-sighted abstraction—they were "greenish-grey," she says, like those of a dove; and the bow of the mouth is not unstrung, but arched as

[1] This portrait, known so well from engravings, may not be of Miss Burney after all. Though painted in 1782, when she was thirty years old, it has a marked appearance of youth.

if holding back the sly, swift satire. She was a small, frail body, we know, and not handsome; yet men felt a singular attraction in her, and women did not withhold their love, and we who read her life cannot think of her as anything but winsome and unhandseled by time.

It was, perhaps, under this impression of her inherent youth that Mr. Dobson has prefixed to his volumes the quaint preface which Fanny wrote down at the age of fifteen, when she had made a solemn holocaust of her childish attempts at literature, and was beginning, instead, the record of her own life:

To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintance, and actions, when the hour arrives at which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a Journal—a Journal in which, I must confess, my *every* thought must open my whole heart.

But a thing of the kind ought to be addressed to somebody—I must imagine myself to be talking—talking to the most intimate of friends—to one in whom I should take delight in confiding, and feel remorse in concealment; but who must this friend be? To make choice of one in whom I can but *half* rely, would be to frustrate entirely the intention of my plan. The only one I could wholly, totally confide in, lives in the same house with me, and not only never *has*, but never *will*, leave me one secret to tell her. [Her "heart's beloved sister, Susanna," we may suppose.] To *whom* then *must* I dedicate my wonderful, surprising, and interesting adventures?—to *whom* dare I reveal my private opinion of my nearest relations? my secret thoughts of my dearest

friends? my own hopes, fears, reflections, and dislikes? —Nobody.

To Nobody, then, will I write my Journal! since to Nobody can I be wholly unreserved, to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity, to the end of my life! . . .

And to this genial confidant the early entries were very properly directed. But with the part of the Diary re-edited by Mr. Dobson, that beginning with the publication of *Evelina* in 1778 and extending to her death, comes a change which makes this preface no longer appropriate, except as indicating those girlish traits that we choose to associate with her name. Most of the record is now addressed to Susan or to her friend, Mr. Crisp, and gradually we become aware that she has in mind the larger public who some day may be curious about her surprising and interesting adventures. She was a true prophet in looking forward to the days when time should be more nimble than memory, for in old age she read over the record with great care, blotting out what might give offence if printed, adding here and there explanatory comments, and leaving a mass of correspondence for her executors to weave into the narrative. Her Nobody develops first into a chosen circle of listeners, and then into a public as gigantic as Polyphemus himself. There are thus three distinct elements in the Diary whose intermingling may add not a little

to its irregular charm. Yet it is a pity, on the whole, that the thought of this final audience ever entered her brain, for it led to a circumspection and to erasures which have probably rendered the limitations of her mind unnecessarily obvious.

But of these it will be sufficient to speak later on. Just now I should like, if possible, to convey to the reader something of the exhilaration which I have myself brought from this renewed acquaintance with so full and sprightly a book. I understand, of course, the difficulty of that task. To those who do not already know the Diary what notion can be given in a brief essay of that overflowing story of sixty-two years, and to those who have read it how dry and inadequate any summary will seem! Yet, with the latter class, at least, there is a ground of assurance. It is good to recall in solitude the speech and acts of a dear friend; it is good also to sit with one who has known him, and to talk over his generous ways. In that interchange of memories the striking events of his life come out more prominently, and his clever words tickle the ears again as if newly spoken; we pass from one point to another of his character as if, in journeying over a fair country, we were carried by some seven-league boots from hilltop to hilltop, with no care for the humbler valleys where the prospect is concealed. Such a dialogue, indeed, I should wish these essays to be—a dialogue in which the

reader plays an equal part with the writer in cherishing the memory of the great moments and persons of our literature.

And it is on one of these eminences of her career that we meet with the subject of this essay at the opening of the present Diary. "This year," it begins, "was ushered in by a grand and most important event! At the latter end of January the literary world was favoured with the first publication of the ingenious, learned, and most profound Fanny Burney! I doubt not but this memorable affair will, in future times, mark the period whence chronologers will date the zenith of the polite arts in this island! This admirable authoress has named her most elaborate performance, *Evelina: or, a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.*" Fanny was at this time in her twenty-sixth year, and had already made her own entrance into the world in a guarded fashion. She was born at King's Lynn, in 1752, the second daughter and third child of a family of eight, nearly all of whom in one way and another showed marked talent. The father, Dr. Charles Burney, was a busy and noted musician, who was engaged in giving lessons among the fashionable world from nine in the morning until nine at night, and who still found time to write, with Fanny's help as amanuensis, an elaborate *History of Music*, and other minor works. After various migrations, he had settled down in London at No. 1 St. Martin's Street,

attracted thither, it seems, by the fact that the house had once been the residence of Isaac Newton, and still showed on the roof a small, wooden tower, with leaden roof and diminutive fireplace, which was supposed to have served the great astronomer as observatory. Dr. Burney himself never used the closet for star-gazing, although he was a devoted student of that science, and even wrote a learned poem thereupon. It seems to have been left by common consent to Fanny for a retreat, where, like a very amiable and very feminine Teufelsdröckh, she might lift herself above the world, and indulge unmolested in the incorrigible family propensity for scribbling.

And it is well for us that such a place of retirement was allowed her, for in the hubbub below stairs she would have found it as hard to conduct her journals as Clarissa or any other badgered heroine of the age. Besides the troop of brothers and sisters, there was a stream of company passing through the lower rooms. Hither came Garrick, the irrepressible, turning the stairs and chambers of the house into a Drury Lane with his droll mimicry; famous singers, the wonderful Agujari and others, sang here before titled and untitled guests, before gay fops and grave gentlemen ; Count Orloff blazed here in all the splendour of his jewels, and kindly displayed to the inquisitive ladies the portrait of the imperial mistress whom he was reputed to have served too well ; Bruce, the Abyssinian King, threatened the ceil-

ings with his gigantic stature; Omai, the South Sea Islander, here made his "remarkable good bows," clad, unfortunately, in merely *English* velvet, but, fortunately, not in his Otaheite garments, which would have been, says the diarist naïvely, "in every respect improper for England"; and by his side Hawkesworth might be heard uttering solemn platitudes in book language, amid the chattering platitudes of less pretentious talkers—altogether a motley society that gathered about the celebrated musician and his clever daughters. As for Fanny, the least promising of the flock, she sat demurely and watched it all, saying little, but launching now and then just the right word, and seeing little with her near-sighted eyes (indeed, all her writing is singularly lacking in visual description), but somehow fixing in her mind the peculiarity and whimsical trait of every guest. That, with the more bourgeois connections of which less is said, gave sufficient preparation for writing a novel which was to keep Burke from his bed all night, was to captivate Dr. Johnson, and take London society by storm.

In some ways the first chapters of the Diary, in which the subject of *Evelina* predominates, are the most entertaining of all. The author's transitions from modesty to innocent vanity, her freshness and vivacity, make the record read like the scenes of a fine comedy. Though the book was dedicated to her father, he was one of

the last to discover its authorship, and from his lips the knowledge passed to "Daddy" Crisp, her mentor and friend of Chessington, than whom no more tantalising figure exists in English letters:

Sunday evening as I was going into my father's room, I heard him say: "The variety of the characters—the variety of the scenes—and the language—why, she has had very little education, but what she has given herself, —less than any of the others!" and Mr. Crisp exclaimed, "Wonderful—it's wonderful!"

I now found what was going forward, and therefore deemed it most fitting to decamp.

About an hour after, as I was passing through the hall, I met my daddy (Crisp). His face was all animation and archness; he doubled his fist at me, and would have stopped me, but I ran past him into the parlour.

Before supper, however, I again met him, and he would not suffer me to escape; he caught both my hands, and looked as if he would have looked me through, and then exclaimed, "Why, you little hussy,—you young devil! An't you ashamed to look me in the face, you *Evelina*, you! Why, what a dance you have led me, about it! Young friend, indeed! Oh, you little hussy, what tricks have you served me!"

And then comes the visit to Streatham, the residence of Mr. Thrale, the brewer, and his wife, where Dr. Johnson made himself so thoroughly at home that nearly a century later the ink spots might be seen which he had dabbled over the floor and walls of his two rooms. The burly, melancholy, tender-hearted dictator forms, so to speak, the chorus of all these early chapters. No

wonder that his approbation almost crazed Fanny with agreeable surprise, so she says, and gave her such a flight of spirits that she danced a jig to Mr. Crisp, without any preparation, music, or explanation—to that good man's no small amazement and diversion. Forty-eight years afterward she still remembered the escapade and told Sir Walter Scott that the scene of it was a mulberry tree in the garden at Chessington—happy Sir Walter, twice happy Mr. Crisp! She no sooner reaches Streatham than Mrs. Thrale takes her into the library and tells her how they had discussed the book at supper the day before, and how Dr. Johnson had declared "Mr. Smith" his favourite character, and had acted him all evening, had even repeated whole scenes by heart. At dinner she sees the great man himself, and speaks of his cruel infirmities with reverence. He sits by her, and in the middle of the dinner asks Mrs. Thrale what is in some little pies near him:

"Mutton," answered she, "so I don't ask you to eat any, because I know you despise it."

"No, madam, no," cried he; "I despise nothing that is good of its sort; but I am too proud now to eat of it. Sitting by Miss Burney makes me very proud to-day!"

"Miss Burney," said Mrs. Thrale, laughing, "you must take great care of your heart if Dr. Johnson attacks it; for I assure you he is not often successless."

Dr. Johnson's manner of flirting was a little heavy, perhaps, but it was certainly flattering.

He mixed the real world and the world of *Evelina* up in a way that must have turned the author's head, and few of the many passing guests escaped without suffering some humorous comparison with the Branghtons, or Mme. Duval, or M. Dubois.

One of the benefits derived from this acquaintance with the Thrales was the opportunity it gave Fanny to travel and pick up odd characters for enlarging the scope of her satire. Brighton was particularly rich in these eccentricities, and not the least of them was a certain General B——y, with his egregious vanity, his absurd set speeches, his violent antipathy to physicians ("those Gallipot fellows!") and his quickly spent pedantry. For neatness in genre painting not many scenes in the Diary can surpass this; it reads like a page of Crabbe set in prose:

Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Selwyn, Mr. Tidy, and Mr. Thrale seated themselves to whist; the rest looked on: but the General, as he always does, took up the newspaper, and, with various comments, made aloud, as he went on reading to himself, diverted the whole company. Now he would cry, "Strange! strange that!"—presently, "What stuff! I don't believe a word of it!"—a little after, "Oh, Mr. Bate, I wish your ears were cropped!"—then, "Ha! ha! ha! *funnibus! funnibus!* indeed!"—and, at last, in a great rage, he exclaimed, "What a fellow is this, to presume to arraign the conduct of persons of quality!"

Having diverted himself and us in this manner, till he had read every column methodically through, he began all over again, and presently called out, "Ha! ha! here 's

a pretty thing!" and then, in a plaintive voice, languished out some wretched verses. . . .

A few minutes after he began puffing and blowing, with rising indignation, and, at last, cried out, "What a fellow is this! I should not be at all surprised if General Burgoyne cut off both his ears!"

"You have great variety there," cried Mr. Hamilton drily; "but I think, Mr. B——y, you have read us nothing to-day about the analeptic pills!"

Though we all smiled at this, the General, unconscious of any joke, gravely answered,

"No, sir! I have not seen them yet, but I dare say I shall find them by and by!"

And, by the time the next game was finished, he called out, "No! I see nothing of the analeptic pills to-day; but here's some Samaritan drops!"

Naturally, with her growing fame and her intimacy at Streatham, other friends of the great world were added to Miss Burney's circle. Sir Joshua Reynolds welcomed her to his studio, and Edmund Burke paid deference to her genius. The proud, the awful Mrs. Montagu invited her to that monstrous house-warming at Portman Square. "Down with her, Burney!" cried the Doctor, and we bless him for his brusquery; "down with her!—spare her not!—attack her, fight her, and down with her at once! You are a rising wit, and she is at the top; and when I was beginning the world, and was nothing and nobody, the joy of my life was to fire at all the established wits! and then everybody loved to halloo me on."

Yet with the increase of friends came a loss.

Mr. Crisp passes away at Chessington. "God bless and restore you, my most dear daddy!" she had written to him in his illness; but—it is the old lesson—*dis aliter visum*. She flew to his bedside and was there to nurse him through his agony; and then comes a pathetic break in the Diary, and her busy pen for awhile is silent. There is nothing in the years that follow which quite takes the place of this genial, quizzical, grumbling, lonely figure, nothing quite like it elsewhere in our literary annals. Macaulay, in his essay on Madame D'Arblay, has used his name to point a moral and to distort, if not adorn, a tale. He had once written a tragedy, a dull tragedy, which had failed, or only partially succeeded, on the stage, and chiefly for pecuniary reasons, he had thereupon gone to dwell in a country boarding-house. To Macaulay he was accordingly "a cynic and a hater of mankind," who had retired to an old hall in one of the most desolate tracts of Surrey, to hide himself "like a wild beast in a den." The picture is grotesquely exaggerated and does wrong to a disappointed but most loving spirit.

There is a lapse of two months in the Diary, as I said, and the succeeding entry is ominous: "We heard to-day that Dr. Johnson had been taken ill, in a way that gave a dreadful shock to himself, and a most anxious alarm to his friends." That was in June of 1783; he died at the close of 1784. Boswell's story of those

melancholy days of decay is well known, but I think there is nothing in Boswell so beautiful as this account in Fanny's Diary of the visit of her father and herself to Bolt Court:

"I hope," he said, "Fanny did not take it amiss that I did not see her? I was very bad!"

Amiss!—what a word! Oh that I had been present to have answered it! My father stayed, I suppose, half an hour, and then was coming away. He again took his hand, and encouraged him to come again to him; and when he was taking leave, said—"Tell Fanny to pray for me!"

Ah! dear Dr. Johnson! might I but have *your* prayers! After which, still grasping his hand, he made a prayer for himself,—the most fervent, pious, humble, eloquent, and touching, my father says, that ever was composed. . . . And again, when my father was leaving him, he brightened up, something of his arch look returned, and he said—"I think I shall throw the ball at Fanny yet!"

There is a word yet to be written about the prayers and meditations of that great soul, about his humility before God and his pride before men; and he who writes of the matter cannot well fail to bear in mind that childlike appeal, "Tell Fanny to pray for me."

But half our time is already gone and we have not yet reached that great episode in Miss Burney's life, her appointment to be Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte, under the command of Madame Schwellenberg. I confess myself in accord with Macaulay rather than with later

writers in regard to this period, and only his trenchant rhetoric can well describe the servitude and vulgarity of existence in George the Third's court—Macaulay's rhetoric or Rochefoucauld's wit: *Les grands noms abaissent au lieu d'élever ceux qui ne les savent pas soutenir.* Fanny took up the rôle against her better judgment and only to serve her father's interests. "If to you alone," she writes, "I show myself in these dark colours, can you blame the plan that I have intentionally been forming—namely, to wean myself from myself—to lessen all my affections—to curb all my wishes—to deaden all my sensations? This design, my dear Susan, I formed so long ago as the first day my dear father accepted my offered appointment." She was herself in many respects singularly unfitted for the place; her near-sightedness kept her in constant dread of not recognising some royalty, her bashfulness and lack of orderliness made her constantly uneasy while serving the Queen, and her health suffered miserably from hours of standing and from running through draughty halls. It is to her credit that she won the affection of the Queen and the abounding love (such a word would be shocking if applied to her Majesty) of the Princesses. There are minds so shallow that a few creeping virtues exhaust the soil and leave no nourishment for the flowers of fancy or the weeds of vice. Charlotte was of that type, and to find any parallel for her court, with its petty formalism,

narrowness of view, and rigid conceit, one must go to the German principalities of the time, from which, indeed, her manners sprung. A breath of scandal, a suspicion of some real human passion, would be welcomed as a relief in her waiting-woman's annals. We wish that the wicked Wales might have wreaked his corruption at Windsor or Kew, instead of in his own haunts, and we are only shocked with pleasure when Fanny describes the reckless young Clarence making the gentlemen in waiting tipsy under the very glare of Mme. Schwellenberg's eyes.

Luckily, the Queen had a kindly, even a sentimental, heart, but no such weakness seasoned the coarse manners and scolding temper of Fanny's immediate superior. At least it was retained for her pet frogs whose "recreative and dulcet croaking" threw her into ecstasies of delight. Fanny seems to have loathed those cold creatures with a rancorous hatred, and alludes to them more than once:

> What a stare was drawn from our new equerry the following evening, by Major Price's gravely asking Mrs. Schwellenberg after the health of her Frogs! She answered they were very well, and the Major said, "You must know, Colonel Gwynn, Mrs. Schwellenberg keeps a pair of Frogs."
>
> "Of Frogs?—pray what do they feed upon?"
>
> "Flies, sir," she answered.
>
> "And pray, ma'am, what food have they in winter?"
>
> "Nothing other."

The stare was now still wider.

"But I can make them croak when I will," she added; "when I only go so to my snuff-box, knock, knock, knock, they croak all what I please."

"Very pretty, indeed!" exclaimed Colonel Goldsworthy.

"I thought to have some spawn," she continued; "but Lady Maria Carlton, what you call Lady Doncaster, came and frightened them; I was never so angry!"

"I am sorry for that," cried the Major, very seriously, "for else I should have begged a pair."

"So you meant, ma'am, to have had a breed of them," cried Colonel Goldsworthy; "a breed of young frogs? Vastly clever indeed!"

Then followed a formal enumeration of their virtues and endearing little qualities, which made all laugh except the new equerry, who sat in perfect amaze.

The life of a sensitive woman under the despicable tyranny of a creature like this could have been nothing less than a continuous torment.

Of course, there were alleviations. Some of the gentlemen and ladies of the palace amused and others pleased her, and of all she has left a series of vignettes drawn with extraordinary precision and not without a touch of relieving malice. There was the Rev. C. de Guiffardière, French reader to the Queen and Princesses, whom she always calls "Mr. Turbulent," and whose boisterous, if innocent, love-making kept her in a state of alarm which at least precluded ennui. As an offset there was Col. Digby (the "Mr. Fairly" of the Diary), as polite and melting as the other was exasperating, who talked with her

of his melancholy and read to her from the poets. He could even suck sentiment from Falconer's *Shipwreck* as Fanny romantically records: "One line he came to, that he read with an emotion extremely affecting. 'T is a sweet line—

He felt the chastity of silent woe.

He stopped upon it, and sighed so deeply that his sadness quite infected me." Mr. Fairly was a widower, and for awhile it looks as if Fanny would be asked to console his chaste woe, but he basely and clandestinely married another woman.

Nor were adventures of a larger sort lacking. The journey of the court to Oxford is filled with interesting details, and the experience of the maids of honour at Nuneham, Lord Harcourt's place near by, their wandering through empty halls and questionable chambers, can only be paralleled by the story of Wilhelm Meister's troupe at the castle of the duke. More absorbing still, not without an undertone of genuine awe, is the recital of the King's illness. She touches lightly on the raving of her royal master, and on the brutal treatment he underwent, as was the custom in those days with the insane. It was her duty each morning to transmit the pages' report of the night to the afflicted Queen, and once to report those horrors was enough. The dark event goes on behind closed doors, but it only gains in power, as in the Greek tragedy, from such a repression:

If this beginning of the night was affecting, she writes, what did it not grow afterwards! Two long hours I waited—alone, in silence, in ignorance, in dread! I thought they would never be over; at twelve o'clock I seemed to have spent two whole days in waiting. I then opened my door, to listen, in the passage, if anything seemed stirring. Not a sound could I hear. My apartment seemed wholly separated from life and motion. Whoever was in the house kept at the other end, and not even a servant crossed the stairs or passage by my rooms.

I would fain have crept on myself, anywhere in the world, for some inquiry, or to see but a face, and hear a voice, but I did not dare risk losing a sudden summons.

I re-entered my room and there passed another endless hour, in conjectures too horrible to relate.

A little after one, I heard a step—my door opened—and a page said I must come to the Queen.

I could hardly get along—hardly force myself into the room; dizzy I felt, almost to falling. . . .

My poor Royal Mistress! never can I forget her countenance—pale, ghastly pale she looked; she was seated to be undressed, and attended by Lady Elizabeth Waldegrave and Miss Goldsworthy; her whole frame was disordered, yet she was still and quiet.

Strange abode of royalty, which only the entrance of madness can strip of its deluded self-complaisance and raise to dignity. One compares the fatuous dulness of Windsor and Kew with the keen and passionate life that throbbed through Versailles and is reflected in a hundred French memoirs. "I think it owing to the good sense of the English that they have not painted better," said Hogarth once to Horace Walpole,

and sometimes one is led to question whether good sense is not held after all at too high a price. It would be a pretty piece of analysis to compare it with the *bon sens* so extolled by Boileau.

It is but fair to add that the limitations of Miss Burney's own mind throw the narrowness of the court into undue prominence. Of the political activities which centred around George III. and which were the only real life of the court, as, indeed, they were of England at that time, she has not a word to say. There is just a glimpse of the intrigues to set the Prince of Wales as regent over the poor mad King, but not even a hint of the larger movements that were converting England from a kingdom to an empire, and changing its government from an oligarchy to a democracy. Those last years of the eighteenth century were big with importance from that side, and sometimes the blindness of Miss Burney to all but the small personalities of the palace is more than annoying. Even at the trial of Warren Hastings, which she heard from the most advantageous position, she displays the same obtuseness of mind. Her account of that scene as a piece of large pictorial writing is extraordinary, but her sympathy and her understanding are confined solely to the persons involved. No suspicion seems to have entered her mind that this gorgeous drama represents a change in the conduct of an empire; she is merely incensed against Burke because he is in opposition to her beloved master;

her judgment does not extend beyond pity for an accused friend. Yet in a way she occasionally exhibits unusual shrewdness. Her comments to Mr. Windham on the failure of Burke's eloquence is a notable piece of literary criticism—the only criticism in the whole Diary, I believe, which is not a mere repetition of the faded platitudes of the day.

Failing health at last forced her to surrender her place; she took with her the blessing of the Queen and a pension of £100, for both of which she was overpowered with gratitude. For a while she was unsettled, but a visit to her sister Susan, now Mrs. Phillips, at Mickleham, Surrey, brought a new influence into her life. Within walking distance of the place was Juniper Hall, an old ale-house which had been remodelled and let to a colony of French émigrés. The company was certainly distinguished, including the Marquise de la Châtre, the Comte de Narbonne, the Duc de Montmorency, and the Duc de Liancourt. Talleyrand, too, was there for a time, and Madame de Staël, and, most fatal of all for Fanny, a certain M. Alexandre D'Arblay, a former *maréchal de camp* and adjutant-general to La Fayette, "a true *militaire franc et loyal*," as Mrs. Phillips described him. There is nothing extraordinary in Fanny's marriage to this gentleman, and the surprise that used to be expressed over it was merely the outcome of insular prejudice. The fact is that Fanny was immediately and very

naturally attracted by the simple manners, the absence of snobbery, and the gay philosophy of these exiles. It must be remembered that her day fell in the dregs of English social life, in what might be called a kind of interregnum between two different worlds. Literature was dead and only a stale echo of it remained among the bluestocking coteries. Wit was fast degenerating into sentimentality. The peculiar virility and large insolence of the early eighteenth century had passed away, while the new society was yet to be born. The men of the age just gone had been originals, with plenty of sins and crudities to answer for; but their originality (I use the word in its old sense) had been one of character, whereas the younger generation were original only in manners. The difference is felt strongly if one turns from the satire of *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random* to that of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, and it is shown equally in the transcripts of real life. The coarse humours of the men in Walpole's letters seem to be the ebullience of some unused and untamed inner strength; in comparison with them the eccentricities of Miss Burney's circle have the appearance of mere whim and sentiment, or of callous insensibility. We catch this note of the day in a thousand places. Miss Monckton at her grand assembly rushes about to disarrange the chairs and break up a circle; in the middle of the evening Lady Galway trots from her

corner, leans her hands on the back of two chairs, thrusts her little round head through two fine high-dressed ladies to peep at Fanny, and trots back to her corner. The Duke of Devonshire lolls back so as to throw down a lustre. "I wonder how I did that," says he coolly; walks to another side of the room, pulls down a second lustre, and strolls away with a "This is singular enough!" These are but little things, but they show the kind of society in which Fanny lived, and they explain why she was so readily captivated by the quiet refinement of Juniper Hall.

The marriage with M. D'Arblay was not long deferred, and for a while we have a pretty idyl of domestic life in a little cottage built on the proceeds from a third novel, and supported by Fanny's scanty pension. From this there is an abrupt transition to the intrigues of Napoleon's court, the excitement of the Restoration, the confusion of the Hundred Days, the suspense at Brussels during the battle of Waterloo, from which Thackeray drew his famous scene in *Vanity Fair*, and the second Restoration. The interest never flags in these chapters, and it would not be easy to find elsewhere a more vivid description of the perturbations and blind currents of fear that lay hold of the individual during these great national catastrophes. One feels the general paralysis of lesser life, while somewhere in the background dark and stupendous powers are wrestling for the mastery.

In England, again, the interest gradually wanes to the close of the writer's life. Yet there are passages of this later record which display, perhaps, more literary skill of the conscious sort than any of the earlier parts. The adventure at Ilfracombe, for example, is told with an art at once realistic and imaginative, and the tale of her husband's death has over it a quiet and ineffable pathos. Macaulay has written harshly of the petrified style adopted by Mme. D'Arblay in her declining years. The censure is deserved, no doubt; and yet for sheer beauty of words she never wrote anything comparable to this expression of her feelings when she heard that the long-delayed end had fallen: "How I bore this is still marvellous to me! I had always believed such a sentence would at once have killed me. But his sight—the sight of his stillness, kept me from distraction! Sacred he appeared, *and his stillness I thought should be mine, and be inviolable.*" There were twenty-one years of memory yet before her, and her own release did not come until the extreme age of eighty-eight.

A "little character-monger" Johnson had called her in her youth, and no phrase can better describe the trait which lends interest to this long Diary. Nowhere else in English will you find anything just like this series of portraits, in which the eccentricities and mannerisms of the age are caught up with so unerring a fidelity and so gentle a malice. In this respect, the two of

her novels which still live, *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, are properly mere excursions in the more realistic transcript of life. Occasionally, to be sure, there is a passage of capital narration, but it is always of a purely personal sort. What we miss in the Diary and the novels alike is any note of passion and any immediate reflection on life, and only this limitation prevents her work from ranking with the great French autobiographies, with which a comparison most naturally occurs. Fanny was a prude, we are told, and she was also, I fear, something of a snob, but the fault did not lie entirely in her own character. Not a little of it must be charged to the state of English society. The fact is, she was a victim of that peculiarly British worship of the social order which from the days of Hobbes had been slowly permeating the national consciousness. That worship was not incompatible with sound statesmanship, or with profound political philosophy as in the case of Burke; it did not lessen the manly independence of a Johnson, and it could serve to whet the barbed arrows of a Walpole. But on a yielding, feminine character such as Miss Burney's its influence was almost omnipotent, so that her prudishness and her snobbery became not so much individual as national; and they are, one must admit, none the less easy to stomach for that reason. There was an actual dead line for her mind. Custom lay like a crust between what was proper and what was unspeak-

able. Above were the family, the State, the Church, the social order; below were gathered all the ruinous emotions of the untamed heart, not the immoral or indecent things, merely, for these, as a matter of fact, might be harmless among gentlemen, but the passionate, rebellious things that create their own law. Richardson had been able to show the working of that seething underworld without shocking society, but only by throwing the burden of responsibility on poor Clarissa's shoulders as the result of filial disobedience. With our Fanny that crust never for a moment really breaks, and her satire skates over the surface of life with unfaltering dexterity.

If this were all, we might call her modest rather than prudish; but into that same forbidden limbo is relegated every immediate and penetrating reflection; it is as if the reverend Constitution of the land had been builded on the law, Thou shalt not think the thing that has not been thought. English literature as a body has, alas! served that law only too well, and we turn elsewhither for quick and logical thought; but in this long diary the lack is unusually apparent. I cannot recall in all the eight volumes of this record kept for seventy-three years a single sentence that shows any immediate reaction of the writer's mind on the troublesome problems of existence. She seems to have passed through the world without experience and without questioning; and at the end we still think of her as

the girl, very English and very innocent, scribbling her satire in the protection of the great Sir Isaac's observatory. Perhaps we cover up her defects by remembering that Newton himself, despite his mightiness in science, was but a child when he came to reflect on human life; and certainly there are few more entertaining books and few names fairer and dearer to us than hers.

NOTE ON "DADDY" CRISP

If any evidence, further than Fanny Burney's Diary, is necessary to show the entire distortion of Macaulay's picture of Samuel Crisp as a wild beast in his lair, it is abundantly forthcoming in a collection of letters written by Crisp from Chessington to his sister, Mrs. Sophia Crisp Gast, at Burford, and now edited by Mr. W. H. Hutton. Crisp was a disappointed man, no doubt, and weariness of the world, as much as the need of economising money and health, led him to make his home at Chesington (as it was then spelled), where there was only one "safe route across the wild common," to which he gave the clew to his friends as a secret. But there was nothing morose in his character, nothing peevish in his retirement. There is a greater measure of truth in the epitaph which Dr. Burney wrote for his friend, and which may still be read in the village church:

"Reader, this cold and humble spot contains
The much lamented, much revered remains
Of one whose wisdom, learning, taste and sense
Good humour'd art and wide benevolence
Cheer'd and enlighten'd all this hamlet round
Wherever genius, worth, or want was found.

To few it is that bounteous Heav'n imparts
Such depth of knowledge, and such taste in arts,
Such penetration and enchanting powers
Of brightening social and convivial hours.
Had he through life been blest by Nature kind
With health robust of body as of mind,
With skill to serve and charm mankind so great
In Arts, in Science, Letters, Church or State,
His name the Nation's annals had enroll'd,
And virtues to remotest ages told."

Like most letters of the age, these of "Daddy" Crisp have a good deal to say about his own health and his correspondent's. "I stand in the first place," he writes, "totally self-condemned for my own notorious indolence and disuse of exercise through the whole winter, besides a most senseless disregard to a proper diet of regimen, for the sake of indulging appetite for the present moment." No wonder that he feels "that hollow inside," and cries out "That old Adam is a powerful obstinate antagonist!" (with an emphasis of capitals which I forego). Clearly, Fanny's friend was not made for the battle of life, either with theatre-managers or with his own unruly members. It is clear, too, that he was tender of himself, fearing exposure, and loving the chimney corner. So he writes to his sister, "Dear Sop," that he will be glad if certain people do not visit him and put him out with their comings and goings. "Besides," he adds, "this cold weather, I want to creep into the fire myself, in my own great chair, and not be obliged to do the honours &c.; whereas, I make Jem [Capt. James Burney] and Fanny make room for me, and never mind them, nor put myself the least out of my way for them." It is the very perfection of the grumbling, *frileux*, habit-ridden, but warm-hearted old bachelor. When he is invited by the Thrales to Streatham, where Fanny and the great Samuel are staying, this

lesser Samuel cannot sleep out of his own bed and is determined to return the same night, though that means two hours of driving in the dark. He goes, and reports a vast deal of company at the dinner—"two courses of 21 Dishes each, besides Removes; and after that a dessert of a piece with the Dinner—Pines and Fruits of all sorts; Ices, Creams, &c., &c., &c., without end—everything in plate, of which such a profusion and such a Side Board: I never saw such at any Nobleman's." Here his grammar apparently gives way under the magnificence, but that was a matter easily dispensed with by the best of these eighteenth-century writers, and if we owed gratitude to Dr. Johnson for nothing else, we should still be in his debt for teaching us the difference between written and spoken language. But grammar returns with his calmer mood. "I got away," he adds, "and reach'd home by 9 o'clock, and glad I was to creep again into my own Nest."

If Crisp worried a good deal about his various ailments, he was even more anxious about his sister, and he had an eye, too, for Fanny's health, as we know. He had reason enough to dread sickness. The wonder is that nature ever resisted the furious assaults of the doctors in those days. Their treatment of disease is notorious, but it would not be easy to recall a better instance than that given in one of Crisp's letters. Dr. Jebb visits at Streatham, where he finds the ladies at tea and Mr. Thrale in his chair by the fire. The rest, though rather long, may be given in Crisp's own words:

"When he came up to Mr. T. and ask'd him how he was; he made no answer; he observ'd his Eyes rowling in his head—he felt his pulse and cried out, Hey day! why, what are you all about? Why this man 's very ill! Up they all started in a fright; the Dr. then shook him and at last made him get out of his Chair; he then cried out he was very cold, and had a shivering Fit. The Company all thought of nothing but a return of the same Fits he had

had before, and if Dr. Jebb had not been there they would have instantly had him blooded, like an ox, as he was before. Providentially his presence prevented this discipline and certainly sav'd his Life—he ordered him instantly to bed, to be plied with hot white wine whey—stay'd with him 3 hours watching his Pulse; declar'd some Crisis was coming on; ordered the whey to be made quite strong, and ply him all night with it. Next morning early return'd; ordered him to drink large quantities of Port, above a bottle a Day, and a large proportion of brandy mix'd with the Port—likewise to give him the highest things to eat, and as plentifully as he could take them—port with brandy without all Stint. The bystanders were frighted, but the Dr. persisted, and at last by this hot work produced a violent Boil in the Nape of his neck, which indeed proved a Carbuncle; he still went on heating him and feeding him up in this manner, which he continues to this hour, and by his bold and judicious proceeding has obtain'd what he wanted. His Carbuncle has been open'd before ripe, by orders, vast quantities of crude undigested blood squeezed out by violence with most excruciating Pain and now this envenom'd Carbuncle is become mild, cool, digests great Quantities of laudable matter; the patient is easy, comfortable in Spirits, and Sharp, the famous Surgeon, and the Dr. both declare him a restor'd Man, and in all probability the secret, and dreadful cause of his several late dangerous attacks, is radically and effectually remov'd; there's a Cure for you!"

Alas, Mr. Thrale died in a few months, despite the physician and his cure. Fanny also was ill at the time from overwork on *Cecilia*, and Dr. Jebb did his best to deprive us of that vessel of delight.

There is not so much in these Letters about Fanny as we should like, but occasional glimpses confirm the best we had already known of her. "She is courted, and

almost adored by the wits," "she is followed and addressed as if she was Pope," but her native simplicity and modesty remain unchanged; she still clings to her old friends and sends a man with a note at ten o'clock at night to inquire after "Daddy" Crisp's health.

GEORGE HERBERT

No other of our lesser poets has received the same long and detailed study which Prof. George Herbert Palmer has lavished on the Rector of Bemerton. As he lay in his cradle, he says, a devotee of Herbert gave him the old poet's name, dedicating his life by that act to the service of so venerable a godfather. And the fruit of this devotion of fifty years is now before us in an elaborate edition of Herbert, that is learned without being pedantic, and full without being replete—the kind of work of which our universities might well be more prodigal[1]. In establishing the text he has, I presume, left nothing for the future to correct. He has discriminated, as no one before him had thought of doing, between the earlier and the later poems. And he has gone further than that; by separating the poems into homogeneous groups, he has thrown the development and inner changes of the writer into sharp relief; a caviller might even say that the relief is here too high, and that a certain

[1] *The English Works of George Herbert.* Newly arranged and annotated and considered in relation to his life, by George Herbert Palmer. Three volumes. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1905.

injustice results from raising the wavering moods of a man into contradictions of character. To all this he has added a series of essays on the life and writings of Herbert which form a proper introduction to the editorial part of the volumes. In particular the chapter on *The Type of Religious Poetry* displays exemplary knowledge of a great and complicated movement.

It might seem as if little were left for the gleaner in this field, as if, indeed, any further writing on this subject would be superfluous or presumptuous; and yet I trust this is not entirely the case. It is even possible that the minute analysis of Professor Palmer's method has hindered him in seeing the real significance of his theme as a whole; otherwise it is hard to understand how he could wave aside so cavalierly the character which Herbert bore to his contemporaries, and has since borne to all the world. "My brother George," wrote the baron of Cherbury, "was so excellent a scholar, that he was made the public orator of the University in Cambridge, some of whose English works are extant, which, though they be rare in their kind, yet are far short of expressing those perfections he had in the Greek and Latin tongue, and all divine and human literature; his life was *holy and exemplary*, in so much that about Salisbury, where he lived beneficed for many years, he was *little less than sainted:* he was not exempt from passion and choler, being infirmities to which all our race is

subject, but that excepted, without reproach in his actions." Holy and little less than sainted Herbert appeared not only to his brother, but to all who walked beside him; nevertheless in his latest editor's mind than holy "a more misleading epithet could not have been devised." It requires a certain temerity thus to run counter to the verdict of tradition, and the scholar who so ventures needs to be well fortified. The fact is, Professor Palmer, despite the long absorption in his theme, brings to it still some alienation of mind. Now lack of sympathy, I know, is a dubious phrase in criticism; it is a bludgeon too often raised by the indiscriminating against any who condemn the lower and false delights of literature in favour of what is high and true. But in the present case it would seem to be connected with a more serious failure of the historic sense. That sense has a double function; it points out the differences that creep in from age to age, the changes of manners and forms that come with time and make the generations of men like foreigners to one another. And here the training of the day will keep any scholar from error. But we are also justified in demanding that clearer faculty of vision which pierces beneath those transient modes and discovers what each age has attained of essential and permanent truth. This is a high faculty of scholarship which is growing daily rarer among us since we have become enslaved by the philosophy

of progress, and one may suspect that Professor Palmer has not altogether avoided bowing the knee to the Idol of the Present. But for this, I do not see why there should be in his essays so continued a note of apology, as if Herbert's religious emotion were something outworn and outgrown, something comprehensible to the man of to-day only by deliberately narrowing his larger spiritual interests to a lesser sphere. At least there is room to doubt whether the religious instinct has deepened with the broadening of our sympathies, and I should like, with all deference to Professor Palmer's authority, and with a frank use of the material his volumes afford, to look at Herbert again for a little while as he appeared to his own age.

And I feel a certain confidence in attempting this, because that great lover of fish and men, Izaak Walton, has left a life of Herbert which is as clear in purpose as it is beautiful in execution. The Herberts were even then an ancient and distinguished clan. In the middle of the fifteenth century the family had divided, the elder branch becoming the Earls of Pembroke, and the younger branch settling at Montgomery, a castle on the eastern marches of Wales. The father of the poet was by direct descent fifth cousin of the two brothers William and Philip, who held the earldom during George Herbert's time. The father of these earls had married the sister Mary for whose sake Sir Philip Sidney wrote his *Arcadia*,

and at Wilton, the home of the Pembrokes, where the greater part of that pastoral was probably composed, George Herbert was an intimate guest and came into contact with the finest literary tradition of the Elizabethan age. It is necessary to remember these things in estimating what may seem a touch of intellectual or spiritual pride in the younger poet.

George Herbert was born at Montgomery, April 3, 1593, being the fifth son in a family of seven boys and three girls. The oldest brother was Edward, the Lord Herbert of Cherbury, whose *Autobiography* reads like one of Defoe's novels with a man of strange and fantastic chivalry instead of a ragamuffin for a hero. Another brother, Henry, was made gentleman of the privy chamber and master of the revels to King James. The father, Sir Richard, died when George was only four years old, and henceforth the care of the family fell upon the mother, Lady Magdalen. Hers was a full and bounteous nature, and one feels about her presence that kind of serene munificence which we attach to the great women of that age as to those of none other. She was the friend and patron of John Donne, who celebrated her autumnal beauty in more than one poem during her life, and at her funeral preached a stately sermon. "Her house," he said, and how the words carry us back to more spacious times—"her house was a court in the conversation of the best, and an

almshouse in feeding the poor. God gave her such a comeliness as though she were not proud of it, yet she was so content with it as not to go about to mend it by any art. And for her attire, it was never sumptuous, never sordid, but always agreeable to her quality and agreeable to her company." She had met Donne at Oxford, whither she had gone after her husband's death to enter her oldest boy, Edward, at Queen's College. There are not many passages finer in their kind than that in which Izaak Walton tells of her wise care for a son whose erratic fancy she no doubt saw and trembled for :

She continued there with him, and still kept him in a moderate awe of her self, and so much under her own eye, as to see and converse with him daily : but she managed this power over him without any such rigid sourness as might make her company a torment to her Child ; but with such a sweetness and complyance with the recreations and pleasures of youth, as did incline him willingly to spend much of his time in the company of his dear and careful Mother ; which was to her great content : for she would often say, That as our bodies take a nourishment sutable to the meat on which we feed ; so our souls do as insensibly take in vice by the example or Conversation with wicked Company : and would therefore as often say, That ignorance of Vice was the best preservation of Vertue ; and that the very knowledge of wickedness was as tinder to inflame and kindle sin and keep it burning. For these reasons she indeared him to her own Company, and continued with him in Oxford four years ; in which time her great and harmless wit, her chearful gravity, and her obliging behaviour,

gain'd her an acquaintance and friendship with most of any eminent worth or learning, that were at that time in or near that University.

There is no need of apologising for the length of this quotation, for it would be wanting in gallantry to pass by so brave and magnanimous a figure with only a word of recognition. But more than that, the two strongest influences in Herbert's life were his mother and that poet-friend for whom, as Walton says, she had "an amity made up of a chain of suitable inclinations and virtues." George was with his mother during these Oxford years, and already, we may believe, he was "eminent and lovely in his innocent age," as he is said to have been a little later at Westminster School. A boy's mind developed early in those days, and it is not forcing matters to suppose that he was impressed by the handsome Italian-looking poet, and wondered at some of his strange poems, for Donne was then a young man under thirty, a writer of passionate, haunting verse, and not yet the grave dean of St. Paul's.

George did not, however, make Oxford his university, but from Westminster went to Trinity College, Cambridge, winning a scholarship in 1609, and taking his bachelor's degree three years later. Already he was preluding to his life work. In the first of his college years he sent his mother a New Year's gift of verse with a letter, of which Walton has preserved this significant fragment :

But I fear the heat of my late Ague hath dried up those springs, by which Scholars say the Muses used to take up their habitations. However, I need not their help to reprove the vanity of those many Love-poems, that are daily writ, and consecrated to Venus; nor to bewail that so few are writ, that look towards God and Heaven. For my own part, my meaning (dear Mother) is, in these Sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor Abilities in Poetry, shall be all and ever consecrated to Gods glory: and I beg you to receive this as one testimony.

My God, where is that antient heat towards thee,
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear Venus Livery? only serve her turn?
Why are not Sonnets made of thee, and layes
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight?
Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
Each breast does feel, no braver fewel choose
Than that, which one day, Worms may chance refuse?

The sonnet (with its sequel, which I omit) may not rank high as poetry, and indeed Herbert himself was afterwards to discard it from his approved verse, but, all things considered, it is remarkable as the profession of a young man of seventeen. It marks in a curious way the crossing of the two main influences on his mind. From his childhood, apparently, his mother had

destined him for the Church, being persuaded to this, it may be, by his feeble health, or by a precocious vein of piety in the lad. It cannot be asserted too strongly that Herbert's was a pliable nature, not without gusty flaws of temper and conscious always of the proud generations that lay behind him, but at bottom docile and subject to outer influences. Other more original forces, such as that of Nicholas Ferrar, were to affect his religious convictions, but, above all, it was the strong spirit of his mother that moulded his to the forms of piety. His letter, written on the eve of manhood, may be read as an avowal to dedicate himself, if not as a priest at least as a poet, to the life she designed for him.

And it shows, to an equal degree, the influence of his mother's friend, John Donne. There is nothing of the eagle in Herbert, nothing of the soaring quality which lifted Donne out of the common sphere, into his own supreme dominion, nothing of that originality which makes of Donne one of the few real turning-points in our literature. Herbert was content to look up at that dizzy flight and follow with humbler wing. How much his poems took their style and manner from Donne's might be shown by a hundred points. Donne, apparently, had found the great conventions of the Elizabethan school tiresome and unreal, and he had broken through them as resolutely as Wordsworth was to rebel against those of the eighteenth century. He swept away

not only the frigid platitudes of the sonnet, but also the flowing ease of the lyric and the larger liberty of the drama. With him the language must be fresh and immediate ; sharp, unusual words must cut through the crust of convention ; the mind must be surprised out of its equilibrium by novel juxtapositions ; the soul must be stirred in its most secret recess by the sudden shock of unexpected emotions. Like Socrates, he would rouse men from their apathy by the jingling of pots and pans and all common things. It is not the highest form of poetry, for that, like manners, must rest on a noble convention and avoid the whim and license of the impertinent individual ; but it was new and stimulating, exquisite at times and again merely grotesque. In all these things Herbert followed his master, only softening the cruder asperities and exercising a gentlemanly taste which his model never possessed. With the other poets of the Jacobean and Caroline age he adopted Donne's use of "conceits" ; he even directly imitated what is perhaps the most curious extravagance in that Museum of Wit. Donne had thought proper to introduce an Epithalamium with a startling description of the morning that ushers in the happy day—and he succeeds. All the "chirping choristers" greet the dawn in his verse, and then—

> The husband cock looks out, and straight is sped,
> And meets his wife, which brings her feather-bed.

Herbert kept the metaphor, but applied it to a

different kind of creature, with no decrease of absurdity in this case, it must be confessed :

> God gave thy soul brave wings; put not those feathers
> Into a bed, to sleep out all ill weathers.

But the influence of Donne goes deeper than style and manner. It is probable that Herbert's very desire to temper religion with poetry was sustained, if not created, by the example of his friend, and certainly, I think, his ambition to be the lyric poet of divine love is derived from that source. Donne's life had suffered a division such as was regular enough in those days, however suspicious it may appear to us. In youth and early manhood he had given himself up to wanton intrigues and had written a series of poems which betray only too frankly his irregular passions. Afterwards he turned to religion, disavowed his earlier pursuits, and sought to make poetry the handmaid of his new faith. It was a course quite familiar to his contemporaries, corresponding to the sharp cleavage in their minds between secular and sacred things. So Joseph Hall indited scurrilous satires before taking orders and devoting his pen to Christian meditations; and a little later Vaughan, to name no others, was to repent his youthful servitude to the profane Muse. Now Herbert began his poetical preludings just about the time when Donne was passing from his first to his second career. We have a letter, dated exactly July 11, 1607,

which Donne sent to Lady Magdalen with a copy of *Holy Hymns and Sonnets*, and a sonnet addressed personally to the recipient. They were no doubt read by Lady Magdalen's son, who was then fourteen; and if there was any wavering in his mind between profane and religious verse, these lines may have weighed in his decision:

O! might those sighs and tears return again
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain.

Again, three years later, Donne, writing to Sir Henry Goodyere, promises a copy of his stanzas called *A Litany* which he compares with the poems canonised by Pope Nicholas and commanded for public service in the churches; but mine, he adds, "is for the lesser chapels, which are my friends." It is a pleasant fancy to think that Herbert, then at Cambridge, was one of these lesser chapels, and may have received the *Litany* from Donne; if so, he would have paused at the twenty-seventh stanza:

That learning, Thine ambassador,
From Thine allegiance we never tempt;
That beauty, paradise's flower
For physic made, from poison be exempt;
That wit—born apt high good to do—
By dwelling lazily
On nature's nothing be not nothing too;
That our affections kill us not, nor die;
Hear us, weak echoes, O, Thou Ear and Eye.

It is dangerously easy, I know, to dwell on these possible coincidences, but at any rate Donne's stanza expresses the kind of influence that was at work upon Herbert when he wrote those two sonnets to his mother. For him there should be no such division as that which made two different poets of Donne; he would clothe his verse in the "Venus livery" of the early Donne and the other Elizabethans, but it should be the Venus Urania; he would be the love-poet of religion. As others had written out their sighs and groans to a deaf mistress, so would he lament when his prayers to Heaven fell back unheard; so would he exult when grace descended into his heart from above. But, and the point needs emphasis, there is nothing to be rebuked in Herbert's marriage of sacred and profane ideas, nothing of the sensuousness that clings to the ardours of Crashaw; above all, no taint of decay such as repels a clean mind in Verlaine's sickly fusion of the flesh and the spirit. It is more in Herbert the close personal relation of the human soul to God and the soul's fluctuations of joy and despondency than any dubious use of amorous metaphor that gives him his position.

For a number of years Herbert remained at Cambridge, carrying out in leisurely fashion this ideal of the Christian poet. In the few letters of his that have been preserved we catch glimpses of his life, of his unstable health, and of his student needs. Best and homeliest of all is a long

epistle to Sir John Danvers, the generous but somewhat erratic gentleman whom his mother had married after a widowhood of twelve years. "I will open my case unto you," he writes, "which I think deserves the reading at the least: and it is this, I want books extremely. You know, Sir, how I am now setting foot into divinity, to lay the platform of my future life; and shall I then be fain always to borrow books, and build on another's foundation? What tradesman is there who will set up without his tools? Pardon my boldness, Sir; it is a most serious case, nor can I write coldly in that wherein consisteth the making good of my former education, of obeying that spirit which hath guided me hitherto, and of achieving my (I dare say) holy ends. . . . I protest and vow, I even study thrift, and yet I am scarce able with much ado to make one half-year's allowance shake hands with the other. And yet if a book of four or five shillings come in my way, I buy it, though I fast for it; yea, sometimes of ten shillings. But, alas Sir, what is that to those infinite volumes of divinity, which yet every day swell and grow bigger?" That was in 1617, when he had been in residence for eight years. In 1619, his scholarship, joined, as Walton says, "with a high fancy, a civil and sharp wit, and with a natural elegance," brought its proper reward and he was appointed to be Orator for the University. He describes the duties of his office pleasantly in a letter to his

stepfather as the finest, though not the gainfullest, to be had : " For the orator writes all the university letters, makes all the orations, be it to the King, prince, or whatever comes to the university ; to requite these pains, he takes place next the doctors, is at all their assemblies and meetings, and sits above proctors ; is regent or non-regent, at his pleasure ; and such like gaynesses, which will please a young man well." The honour and the high society which now opened to him were in full accord with Herbert's temperament. He became a favourite with King James, and made a point of attending the court when it moved within reach of Cambridge, even going so far as to leave the routine of the office to his secretary for this purpose. He grew intimate with Bacon, whom he addressed, on the publication of his *Instauratio Magna*, as " Mundique et animarum Sacerdos unicus," and who in turn consulted Herbert's opinion before he would expose any of his books to be printed, and in 1625 dedicated to Herbert his *Translation of Certain Psalms into English Verse.* He was undoubtedly fluttered by these worldly approbations, and lured to seek higher honours and to travel abroad, but now as always he was anchored by the steady trust of his mother and kept from perilous flights :

> Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
> The way that takes the town,

Thou didst betray me to a lingring book
And wrap me in a gown.
I was entangled in the world of strife
Before I had the power to change my life.

But all this may not mean that Herbert either in act or thought betrayed the purpose to which he had dedicated himself. The fair and innocent formalities of life were a part of his nature; they even fitted in with his poetic aspirations. Later, when the shadow of death was upon him, he might fall into the common dualism of his age and speak with repentance of the content he had "taken in beauty, in wit, in music, and pleasant conversation," but no such doubts tyrannised over him now; his biographer Oley could even despair of describing "that person of his, which afforded so unusual a contesseration of elegancies and singularities to the beholder." Clothes might be a matter of significance to him, as in our day they were to Mr. Shorthouse; these things, which other less devout souls have so despised, formed then a part of his sacramentarian view of religion as they did to John Inglesant, who, in many but not all ways, is the modern counterpart of that seventeenth-century faith.

Let thy minde's sweetness have his operation
Upon thy body, clothes, and habitation,

Herbert had written in his Cambridge period. He might have called virtue, as did St. Augus-

tine, a *vera ordo in amore*, and dignified the orderliness of a man's outer habit as the reflection of an inner consonance with God's law. He was afterwards to find the desired harmony of life in the humbler practices of a priest; now his native instinct led his feet rather to the King's court. We whose training is so different must remember that to many in those days kingship was a divine institution, just as was the Church. It gathered up and symbolised the requirements of orderly beauty in things secular, as the Church did in things spiritual, and the two at times might seem to a mind steeped in symbolism almost to flow together. "Think the king sees thee still," Herbert wrote for his own guidance; "for his King does." Nor were his vows forgotten; through all these distractions he added steadily to his little store of poetry which should be, as it were, his courtly Book of Common Prayer:

> To write a verse or two is all the praise
> That I can raise.
> Mend my estate in any wayes,
> Thou shalt have more.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> O raise me then! Poore bees, that work all day,
> Sting my delay;
> Who have a work as well as they,
> And much, much more.

Let us not, however, fall into the other extreme and exaggerate the harmony of Herbert's career. He was no mere sentimentalist, but a man of

subtle understanding. He had occasional moments of depression, as his poems show, and sometimes felt that he was still pausing below the full consecration to which his mother had destined him, and that he still wanted the highest grace, which comes with sacrifice. In 1626 he was appointed prebendary of the parish of Leighton, having already received the order of deaconship, and took upon himself to rebuild the church which was crumbling away into ruin. Five miles from Leighton was Little Gidding, where Nicholas Ferrar resided. He called on his friend for assistance in this work, and from that time the two men were sealed in intimacy. Many letters passed between them, but these unfortunately have not come down to us. In 1627 Lady Magdalen died. Other recent deaths had loosened his hold on the world, but the loss of his mother cast him completely adrift. Was it at this time he wrote that strange poem of *Mortification*, in which he described the five ages of man as five deaths prefiguring the final transition to the grave? It begins with the cradled infant:

> How soon doth man decay!
> When clothes are taken from a chest of sweets
> To swaddle infants, whose young breath
> Scarce knows the way,
> Those clouts are little winding sheets
> Which do consigne and send them unto death:—

and ends with the lesson:

Man ere he is aware
Hath put together a solemnitie,
And drest his herse while he has breath
As yet to spare.
Yet Lord, instruct us so to die
That all these dyings may be life in death.

Herbert, we have seen, was much influenced by Donne; it is curious to note that in the last sermon he ever preached the Dean of St. Paul's seems to have remembered this poem of his pupil and to have imitated it. "That which we call life," he said, "is but *Hebdomada mortium*, a week of death. . . . Thus birth dies in infancy, and our infancy dies in youth, and youth and the rest die in age, and age also dies and determines all."

Immediately after his supreme loss, Herbert gave up the oratorship and left the university. For three years he led a wandering life, unsettled in body and mind. There was, in fact, something of Hamlet in his mental disposition, and the subtleties of the imagination overbalanced the will to act. It was his nature to hesitate and dally until some impulse from without stimulated him, and then his movement was curiously abrupt. So it was that, in 1629, he suddenly married Jane Danvers, a relative of the Earl of Danby with whom he had become acquainted through his mother's second husband. Tradition would have it that this event occurred only three days after his first interview with the lady, and

such haste would suit well enough with his temper. The next year he accepted the rectorship of Fuggleston-cum-Bemerton. Fuggleston church stood at the gate of Wilton, the estate of the Pembrokes, where Herbert was always welcome, lying three miles from Salisbury. The ministry of this place he left to his curate, and took upon himself the care of Bemerton, "a pitiful little chapel of ease," forty-six feet long by eighteen wide, with a ruinous rectory across the way. Both church and house he repaired and adorned at his own expense. How solemnly he entered upon his sacred charge may be read in the happy words of Izaak Walton:

When at his Induction he was shut into Bemerton Church, being left there alone to Toll the Bell, (as the Law requires him,) he staid so much longer than an ordinary time, before he return'd to those Friends that staid expecting him at the Church-door, that his Friend Mr. Woodnot look'd in at the Church-window, and saw him lie prostrate on the ground before the Altar; at which time and place (as he after told Mr. Woodnot) he set some Rules to himself, for the future manage of his life; and then and there made a vow to labour to keep them. And the same night that he had his Induction, he said to Mr. Woodnot, I now look back upon my aspiring thoughts, and think myself more happy than if I had attain'd what then I so ambitiously thirsted for. And I can now behold the Court with an impartial Eye, and see plainly that it is made up of Fraud and Titles, and Flattery, and many other such empty, imaginary painted Pleasures; Pleasures, that are so empty, as not to satisfy when they are enjoy'd. But in God and his service, is a

fulness of all joy and pleasure, and no satiety. And I will now use all my endeavours to bring my Relations and Dependants to a love and relyance on Him, who never fails those that trust him. But above all, I will be sure to live well, because the vertuous life of a Clergyman is the most powerful eloquence to perswade all that see it to reverence and love, and at least to desire to live like him.

It does not seem to me that such words as these should lead us to emphasise the contrast between Herbert's courtly and his priestly life, nor can I persuade myself that Professor Palmer is not a little carried away with his analytical method when he dwells on the fact that only three years out of thirty-nine were given to the Church. There was no convulsion in Herbert's inner experience, no wrenching conversion from the world, but rather a growth in assurance, passing through seasons of doubt. His latest verse is merely a development and deepening of what he had set himself to sing at the age of seventeen. In all lives there is a certain period which stamps itself on the popular memory as expressive of the man's essential nature; it is not measured by duration, but by significance. The consummation of this inner tendency had been delayed in Herbert by other modes of fulfilling his ideal, by a hesitancy of will, by the feeling of his friends that the calling of a minister was not worthy of his high birth and talents, by worldly allurements, if you please; but it came as surely

as the tropic vine struggles up to freedom, and in the sunlight spreads its blossoms. After all, he had just turned thirty-seven when he accepted his charge, and should it be weighed against him that he did not live to complete his fortieth year?

Of those three years of priesthood we have a picture of singular beauty and winsomeness. To the humblest duties of his office he gave himself with unreserved devotion, and in his prose treatise of *The Country Parson* he has left a manual of conduct whose sincerity of aim and fine simplicity make it still attractive to-day to the lay reader. About the ordinances of worship, which he carried out with extreme regularity, his fancy played with a kind of cherishing wit, as when he wrote of the communion cup:

> O what sweetness from the bowl
> Fills my soul,
> Such as is and makes divin!
> Is some starre (fled from the sphere)
> Melted there,
> As we sugar melt in wine?

His chief diversion now, as it had always been, was music. "He was a most excellent master," says Walton, "and he did himself compose many divine hymns and anthems, which he set and sung to his lute or viol. And, though he was a lover of retiredness, yet his love to music was such, that he went usually twice every week, on certain appointed days, to the cathedral church

in Salisbury; and at his return would say that his time spent in prayer and cathedral music elevated his soul, and was his heaven upon earth. But before his return thence to Bemerton he would usually sing and play his part at an appointed private music-meeting; and, to justify this practice, he would often say, Religion does not banish mirth, but only moderates and sets rules to it." It was but a walk of a mile across pleasant meadows from Bemerton to Salisbury, whose spire is visible from the rectory windows. Many times he made this brief journey the occasion of good works, and once he appeared before his hosts well spattered with mud from assisting a poor stalled carter. When he was twitted by his friends for disparaging himself with so dirty an employment, his answer was "that the thought of what he had done would prove music to him at midnight"; and added, "I would not willingly pass one day of my life without comforting a sad soul or showing mercy."

There were indeed times of depression, almost of agony; seasons when he regretted the sacrifice of courtly amenities. Often he found grief "a cunning guest"; often his high pretensions to faith appeared to him a mockery, and to many readers the poems in which he expresses these fluctuations of joy and sorrow will seem the richest in human experience of the collection. But I cannot see that for this reason he should be denied the epithet of holy which those who knew him best

were quickest to ascribe to him. His was not the spirit of the triumphant hero, perhaps not even that of the martyr, and it is easy to understand why he was rejected by the fighting cohort of Oxford in the last century. "The worthies of the Church of England," said one of these belligerents, "even when sharing the tender piety of George Herbert or Bishop Ken, fell short of the heroic aims, the martial sanctity, gained by warfare unceasing against world, flesh, and devil, which they found exhibited in Roman hagiology." That may be true, but do we refuse to call Bunyan holy because he wrestled with despair, or Fénelon because he hankered after Versailles, or St. Paul because he could not pluck out the thorn from his flesh, or the Master of St. Paul for the agony at Gethsemane?

And withal the dominant tone in Herbert is one of quiet joy and peace. From the very doubts and hesitations that beset him he wrung a submissive victory, as may be read in that most characteristic of his poems, *The Pulley:*

When God at first made man,
Having a glasse of blessings standing by,
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can.
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way,
Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure
Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewell also on my creature,
He should adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature.
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessnesse.
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse
May tosse him to my breast.

Will you pardon me a fancy? As often as I read these stanzas the picture rises before me of the Salisbury fields. It is an afternoon of the early autumn, when the grey sunlight shimmers in the air and scarcely touches the earth, brooding over all things with a kind of transient peace. A country parson, after a day of music in the cathedral and at the house of a friend, is walking homeward. In his heart is the quiet afterglow of rapture, not unlike the subdued light upon the meadows, and he knows that both are but for a little while. Memory is awake as she is apt to be in the trail of exaltation, and he recalls the earlier scenes of his life—the peculiar consecration of his youth, the half-hearted ambitions of the scholar and courtier, the invisible guidance that had brought him at last to the sheltered haven whereto he was even now returning. Providence and the world had dealt kindly with him as with few others, yet one thing was still lacking —he had not found rest. He was aware, keenly

aware, that this moment of perfect calm lay between an hour of enthusiasm and an hour of dejection. He was not like some he knew who laid violent hands on the kingdom of peace; he must suffer his moods. And then came the recollection of the Greek Hesiod whom he had studied at Cambridge, and of the story of Pandora. The quaint contrast of that myth with the certainty of his own faith teased him into reflection. Hope, indeed, the new dispensation had released from the box and had poured out blessings instead of ills; but one thing still remained shut up—*rest in the bottom lay*. And straightway he began to remould the Greek fable to his own experience.

All this is consonant with the tone which in the beginning he adopted as the lyric poet of divine love, and which remained with him in his Bemerton study:

Why do I languish thus, drooping and dull,
As if I were all earth?
O give me quicknesse, that I may with mirth
Praise thee brim-full!

The wanton lover in a curious strain
Can praise his fairest fair,
And with quaint metaphors her curled hair
Curl o're again.

Thou art my lovelinesse, my life, my light,
Beautie alone to me.
Thy bloudy death and undeserv'd makes thee
Pure red and white.

. . . . . .

Where are my lines then? My approaches? Views?
Where are my window-songs?
Lovers are still pretending, and ev'n wrongs
Sharpen their Muse.

. . . . . .

Lord, cleare thy gift, that with a constant wit
I may but look towards thee.
Look onely; for to *love* thee, who can be,
What angel fit?

To some this peculiarly individual note in religion, this anxiety over his personal beatitude, will be a stumbling-block. "For the most part," says Professor Palmer in disdain, "he is concerned with the small needs of his own soul." It is like a taunt thrown ungraciously at the ideals of a great and serious age. My dear sir, even to-day in the face of our magnified concerns, are the needs of a man's soul so small that we dare speak of them with contempt? I am not holding a brief from the human soul. Let it be, if you choose, a mere name for certain hopes and fears which separate from the world and project themselves into eternity; but let us recognise the fact that those hopes and fears have been of tremendous force in the past, and are still worthy of reverence. It is one of the glories of Herbert's age that it introduced into poetry that quick and tremulous sense of the individual soul. Religion came to those men with the shock of a sudden and strange reality, and we who read the report of their experience are ourselves stirred,

willingly or rebelliously, to unused emotions. Do you know, in fact, what most of all is lacking in the devotional poetry of recent times? It is just this direct personal appeal. Take, for example, the better stanzas of Keble's *Whitsunday:*

So, when the Spirit of our God
Came down His flock to find,
A voice from Heaven was heard abroad,
A rushing, mighty wind.

Nor doth the outward ear alone
At that high warning start;
Conscience gives back the appalling tone;
'Tis echoed in the heart.

It fills the Church of God; it fills
The sinful world around;
Only in stubborn hearts and wills
No place for it is found.

That is Keble's version of the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost; set it beside a single stanza of Herbert's poem of the same name:

Listen, sweet Dove, unto my song
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing and flie away with thee.

Is the advantage all in favour of the modern faith? Or rather, is not the response to the descending spirit in Keble dulled by the intrusion of foreign interests, by the sense that he is writing for the Church and imparting a moral lesson, whereas

in Herbert you feel the ecstatic uplift that springs from the immediate contact of the poet's imagination with its object? Religion has changed from the soul's intimate discovery of beatitude to the dull convention of sermons. "He speaks of God like a man that really believeth in God," said Baxter of Herbert; is this altogether a small matter?

Nor is it quite true that his personal concern with religion is a selfish withdrawal from men or that "any notion of dedicating himself to their welfare is foreign to him." Such a statement would have been unintelligible to Herbert's contemporaries; it forgets the sacramental nature of the priesthood as it was then conceived. His days, indeed, were given to the humblest duties and charities, yet to his friends it would have seemed that the example of so saintly a life was a still more perfect beneficence than any ministrations of the body. Such, too, was the more difficult ideal that Herbert set before himself:

> Holinesse on the head,
> Light and perfections on the breast,
> Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
> To lead them unto life and rest;
> Thus are true Aarons drest.

And, beyond the mere force of example, it was supposed that worship in itself was an excellent thing, and that some grace was poured out upon

the people through the daily intercessions of their priest:

Of all the creatures both in sea and land
Onely to Man thou hast made known thy wayes,
And put the penne alone into his hand,
And made him Secretarie of thy praise.

Beasts fain would sing; birds dittie to their notes;
Trees would be tuning on their native lute
To thy renown; but all their hands and throats
Are brought to Man, while they are lame and mute.

Man is the world's high Priest. He doth present
The sacrifice for all; while they below
Unto the service mutter an assent,
Such as springs use that fall and windes that blow.

. . . . . .

Wherefore, most sacred Spirit, I here present
For me and all my fellows praise to thee.
And just it is that I should pay the rent,
Because the benefit accrues to me.

And it was in this sense that elsewhere he likened the priest to a window in the temple wall, "a brittle crazy glass," through which, nevertheless, the light fell upon the people stained with holy images. His poems he called *window-songs*. Certainly to Walton the concern "with the small needs of his own soul" did not appear to be an abuse of precious talents. Says the Life: "And there, by that inward devotion which he testified constantly by an humble behaviour and visible adoration, he, like Joshua, brought not only his own household thus to serve the Lord, but

brought most of his parishioners, and many gentlemen in the neighbourhood, constantly to make a part of his congregation twice a day. And some of the meaner sort of his parish did so love and reverence Mr. Herbert that they would let their plough rest when Mr. Herbert's saints-bell rung to prayers, that they might also offer their devotions to God with him; and would then return back to their plough. And his most holy life was such that it begot such reverence to God, and to him, that they thought themselves the happier when they carried Mr. Herbert's blessing back with them to their labour."

A part of the intense individualism of Herbert's religion during these last years was no doubt due to the increasing burden of ill health. Occasionally a note of pure bodily pain breaks through his song, and the thought of the inevitable end grew daily more insistent. Death is a thing of which we have become ashamed. We huddle it up and speak of it with averted glance. But it was not always so; men of Herbert's day looked upon it as the solemn consummation of life and prepared for it as for a public ceremony. Read Sir Thomas Browne's *Letter to a Friend*, and see how he dwells on the "deliberate and creeping progress into the grave." Or go not so far; stop in the eighteenth century and read the letters in which Cowper relates the passing of his brother. You will find nothing comparable to this in the literature of to-day; the very word is almost banished

from our books. It may be that we have gained in power by putting away from us the thought of this paralysing necessity, yet sometimes I wonder if we have not suffered an equal loss. For with Herbert, at least, the fairest of his poems were inspired by this ever-present thought. A very thrill of joy leaps through such lines as these:

> What wonders shall we feel when we shall see
> Thy full-ey'd love!
> When thou shalt look us out of pain.

Is the rapture of Dante, lifted from sphere to sphere at the sight of Beatrice's eyes, finer than this *When thou shalt look us out of pain?* And death is the theme of that sweetest song, which no one who writes of Herbert can afford to omit:

> Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridall of the earth and skie;
> The dew shall weep thy fall to night,
> For thou must die.
>
> Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave
> Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;
> Thy root is ever in its grave,
> And thou must die.
>
> Sweet spring, full of sweet dayes and roses,
> A box where sweets compacted lie;
> My musick shows ye have your closes,
> And all must die.
>
> Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
> Like season'd timber, never gives;
> But though the whole world turn to coal,
> Then chiefly lives.

Just before the end Herbert gave to a friend who was visiting him a manuscript book, bidding him deliver it to Nicholas Ferrar to be made public or burned as that gentleman thought good. It was, as he described it, a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that had passed betwixt God and his soul, being the small volume of verse which was the labour and the fruit of his life. There is much to censure critically in the work, much that is frigid and fantastic; but at its best the note is rare and penetrating, with the tinkling purity of a silver sacring bell. Many have loved the book as a companion of the closet, and many still cherish it for its human comfort; all of us may profit from its pages if we can learn from them to wind ourselves out of the vicious fallacy of the present, and to make our own some part of Herbert's intimacy with divine things.

KEATS

In its pleasures and its toils the case of the critic, I often think, is not unlike that of the adventurous traveller. Every author into whose life in turn he diverts his own is to him a new voyage of exploration. He comes back laden with memories, whether the land he has traversed be one in the highways of commerce and already trodden by many feet, or an island almost forgotten in far-off seas. Cities of men he visits, and walks in crowded streets, or sits by sheltered hearths. Again, it is a country of unpeopled solitudes, where things of loveliness waylay him, or monstrous forms startle and affright. There are recollections of homely comfort to reward his toil; and of high adventures, as when, like Balboa, he stands and looks out, the first of men, over the infinite unknown Pacific; and there are ways of terror where he wanders alone on desolate frozen coasts and, far as the eye can reach, sees only ruinous death. All these visions and remembered emotions he carries to his desk, counting himself blessed if some happy chance of language or some unusual quickening of the blood shall enable him to convey to others though it be but a small part

of his experience. That good fortune, he feels, with all noble conquests, is reserved for the poets :

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne ;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

It is the sonnet that to most people probably comes first to mind when Keats is named and his destiny remembered. There is about it the golden flush and wonder of youth—it was written in his twentieth year—and one catches in it also, or seems to catch, a certain quickness of breath which forebodes the rapture so soon quenched. The inspiration of unsoiled nature and of England's clear-voiced early singers is here mingled as in no other of our poets. And especially this inheritance of the Elizabethan age rediscovered in a later century will have a new significance to any one who has just gone through the

poems in the volume edited by Mr. E. de Sélincourt.[1]

There is a good deal to commend in this scholarly edition of Keats; the text has been prepared with extreme accuracy, and the notes, properly placed at the end of the book, are thorough and apposite. Mr. de Sélincourt's interest has lain more particularly in the study of sources, and Keats, among the most derivative and at the same time original of English poets, offered him here a rich field. For one thing, he has exploded the silly myth of the Lemprière. To that dictionary (still a serviceable book, be it said, in its own way) Keats no doubt owed his acquaintance with many details of antiquity, but most of his information and all the colour and movement that made of those legends a living inspiration he got from the translations of Chapman and Sandys and from the innumerable allusions in Spenser and the other great Elizabethans. One might have surmised as much from his sonnet to Chapman's Homer without waiting for the present editor's erudition. To call him a Greek, as Shelley did explicitly and as Matthew Arnold once did by implication, is to miss the mark. "Keats was no scholar," says Mr. de Sélincourt aptly, "and of the literature in which the Greek spirit found true expression he could know nothing. But just as

[1] *The Poems of John Keats.* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by E. de Sélincourt. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1905.

it was through his devotion to Spenser that he became a poet, so was it through his kinship, both in spirit and taste, with the Elizabethans, that he became the poet of ancient Greece."

I am inclined to think that the essential kinship of Keats to "The fervid choir that lifted up a noise of harmony," as he called them, rests upon something even deeper than similarity of language and poetic method or than "natural magic," that it goes down to that faculty of vision in his mind which, like theirs, beheld the marriage of the ideas of beauty and death. As an editor concerned with the minutiæ of the poet's manner, Mr. de Sélincourt may well be pardoned for overlooking this more essential relationship; his services are sufficiently great after every deduction. It is not a small thing, for instance, to find in the Glossary a careful tabulation of the sources from which Keats drew his extraordinary vocabulary, and from the first word, "a-cold," to see how constantly he borrowed from Shakespeare and Milton and the writers that lie between, and how deliberately he sought to echo "that large utterance of the early Gods." The curious thing is that in the end all this borrowing should produce the impression of a fine spontaneity. Just as we are discovering more and more in the spaciousness of the Elizabethans a literary inspiration from foreign lands, so the freedom of diction in Keats was in large measure the influence of a remote age—which may be taken as another

lesson in the nature of originality. The effect is as if the language were undergoing a kind of rejuvenation and no dulness of long custom lay between words and objects. Wordsworth's endeavour to introduce the speech of daily use is in comparison the mere adopting of another artifice.

It is scarcely necessary to add that this spontaneity in a mind so untrained as Keats's often fell into license and barbarism. From the days of the first reviewers his ill-formed compound terms and his other solecisms have, and quite rightly, been ridiculed and repudiated. Sometimes, indeed, his super-grammatical creations have a strange quality of genius that rebukes criticism to modesty. Thus in the familiar lines :

> As when, upon a trancèd summer-night,
> Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, *branch-charmèd* by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave—

it is not easy to justify "branch-charmèd" by any common linguistic process ; and yet who does not feel that the spell of the passage, the very mystery of its utter beauty, is concentrated in that one lawless word? It is the keystone of a perfect arch. By a stroke of rarer insight Keats, when he came to rewrite the scene for the later *Hyperion*, left that phrase untouched, though he

changed, and in changing marred, nearly all the rest. But if occasionally these unlicensed expressions add to the magic of his style, more often they are merely annoying blemishes. There is no beauty in such a phrase as "unslumbrous night," to take the first words that occur, no force in "most drowningly doth sing," and his elision (which occurs more than once) of perhaps into *p'rhaps* is of a sort to make even a hardened reader wince.

The fact is, Keats might learn from the Elizabethans almost every element of style except taste, and here where he most needed guidance they seemed rather to sanction his lawlessness. But there was a difference between their circumstances and his. When a language is young and expanding, the absence of restraining taste is not so much felt, and liberty is a principle of growth; whereas at a later stage the same freedom leads often to mere eccentricity and vulgarisms. So it is that in Keats's language we are often obliged to distinguish between a true Elizabethan spontaneity and a spurious imitation that smacks too much of his London surroundings. We resent justly the review of *Endymion* in *Blackwood's* in which the author was labelled as belonging to "the Cockney School of Poetry"; we take almost as a personal affront the reviewer's coarse derision: "So back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to 'plasters, pills, ointment boxes'"; yet there is a hideous particle of truth in the insult which will

forever cling to Keats's name. Great poets have come out of London, but only Keats among the immortals can be pointed at as "cockney."

There is, in fact, something disconcerting in the circumstances of the poet's early life. He was born in London in 1795. His father, a west-countryman, probably with Celtic blood in his veins, was employed in a livery stable, of which he afterwards became manager, marrying the owner's daughter. He died when John was nine years old. The mother soon married a Mr. William Rawlings, also stable-keeper, who apparently had succeeded her first husband in the Moorgate business. She lived but a few years, and the family of children, of which John was the eldest, were left orphans. There was some money, and though towards the end pecuniary troubles came upon him, Keats was in this respect more fortunate than many others; he never had to waste his powers by writing for bread. Between the years of 1806 and 1810 he attended a fairly good school kept by the Rev. John Clarke at Enfield. After this he was apprenticed for five years to a surgeon at Edmonton, and then went, as the phrase is, to walk the London hospitals. Meanwhile he had been studying other things besides the human anatomy. Charles Cowden Clarke, the son of his schoolmaster, one day memorable in the annals of literature, had read Spenser's *Epithalamium* to him, and lent him *The Faerie Queen* to take home. It was letting the wind in

upon a sleeping fire. Said a friend in after days: "Though born to be a poet, he was ignorant of his birthright until he had completed his eighteenth year. It was *The Faerie Queen* that awakened his genius. In Spenser's fairy-land he was enchanted, breathed in a new world, and became another being; till enamoured of the stanza, he attempted to imitate it, and succeeded. This account of the sudden development of his poetic powers I first received from his brothers and afterwards from himself. This, his earliest attempt, the *Imitation of Spenser*, is in his first volume of poems, and it is peculiarly interesting to those acquainted with his history."

There was no more walking of hospitals for Keats. His first volume of *Poems* was published in 1817, with the significant motto from Spenser:

> What more felicity can fall to creature
> Than to enjoy delight with liberty.

It contains the first project of *Endymion*, the *Epistles*, in which Keats unfurls the flag of rebellion against poetic "rules," and a group of sonnets, including that on *Chapman's Homer*. The next year appeared the true *Endymion*, which won him the abuse of the reviewers and the admiration of Shelley. Only two years later, in 1820, when he was not yet twenty-five, there followed that wonderful book which has assured to him the passionate desire of his life, a place

"among the English Poets." No poet of England at that age, barely four or five at any age, had published such works as these,—*Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Hyperion*, and the great Odes. What else he wrote was only to be printed posthumously, including, among other poems, the revised *Fall of Hyperion*, the exquisite fragment on *The Eve of Saint Mark*, the haunting ballad of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and the Dramas. Over some of this later work there seems to be a flush of hectic impatience, the creeping on of that dread which he had expressed in a sonnet, written indeed as early as 1818, but not published until after his death:

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has gleau'd my teeming brain,
> Before high-pilèd books, in charact'ry,
> Hold like full garners the full-ripen'd grain;
> When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
> That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
> Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
> Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

It expresses the ever-present fear of his brief life, but it contains also, at the close, the nearest approach in Keats to that profounder vision of disillusion which separates the Elizabethans from

him; it calls to mind what are, I think, the greatest lines of Keats's Italian contemporary, Leopardi:

Io quello
Infinito silenzio a questa voce
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l' eterno,
E le morte stagioni, e la presente
E viva, e il suon di lei. *Così tra questa*
Immensità s' annega il pensier mio;
E il naufragar m' è dolce in questo mare.

(I anon
That infinite silence with this voice compare:
And I remember the eternal one,
The seasons of the dead, and this of care
About us and its sound. So as I wonder,
My thought in this immensity sinks under;
And shipwreck in that sea is sweet to bear.)

But Keats owed to Cowden Clarke something more than his intellectual awakening; it was through the same friend he was introduced to the circle of literary and artistic men in London who supported and stimulated him in his work. Chief among these in his early impressionable years were Leigh Hunt and the half-mad painter, B. R. Haydon, and unfortunately both of these advisers reinforced the natural qualities of his mind with what may be called a kind of bastard, or cockney, Elizabethanism. It is painful to follow that influence, as so much in Keats's life is painful. In his maturity he could see the weakness of these friends and speak of them dispassionately enough. Of Leigh Hunt he wrote to his brother George,

then in America: "*Hunt does one harm by making fine things petty and beautiful things hateful.* Through him I am indifferent to Mozart, I care not for white Busts—and many a glorious thing when associated with him becomes a nothing." So much Keats could see, but never, even in his greatest works, could he quite free himself from that malign influence; for it had laid hold of a corresponding tendency in his own nature. He was never quite able to distinguish between the large liberties of the strong and the jaunty flippancy of the underbred; his passion for beauty could never entirely save him from mawkish prettinesses, and his idea of love was too often a mere sickly sweetness. Never after the days of *Endymion*, perhaps, did he write anything quite in the character of "Those lips, O slippery blisses"; but even in the volume of 1820 he could not be sure of himself. There are too many passages there like these lines in *Lamia*:

> He, sick to lose
> The amorous promise of her lone complain,
> Swoon'd, murmuring of love, and pale with pain.

Not a little of this uncertainty of taste was due to Leigh Hunt.

And in the same way Haydon confirmed Keats on another side of his cockney Elizabethanism. Haydon himself was a man of vast and undisciplined, almost insane, enthusiasms, and he undoubtedly did much to keep the ambitious

longings of Keats in a state of morbid fermentation. It would be a curious study to trace the friendship and humorous rupture of these two men in Keats's letters and in those journals of Haydon where so many of the geniuses of the day are presented in startling undress. At first all is smoothness. Keats tells Haydon in a letter "that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age —The Excursion, Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste"—poor Hazlitt being supplanted in a sonnet on the same theme by Hunt,

> He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
> The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake.

On his part the painter describes his friend as the ideal poet; "Keats was the only man I ever met," he wrote, "who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling, except Wordsworth." Then it is a letter from Haydon:

> I love you like my own brother. Beware, for God's sake, of the delusions and sophistications that are ripping up the talents and morality of our friend! [A kindly allusion to Hunt] . . . Do not despair. Collect incident, study character, read Shakespeare, and trust in Providence, and you *will* do, you must.

Which brings from Keats this exalted reply:

> I know no one but you who can be fully sensible of the turmoil and anxiety, the sacrifice of all what [*sic*] is called comfort, the readiness to measure time by what is done and to die in six hours could plans be brought to conclusions—the looking upon the Sun, the Moon, the Stars,

the Earth and its contents, as materials to form greater things—that is to say, ethereal things—but here I am talking like a Madman—greater things than our Creator himself made!!

Later a coolness sets in, occasioned by a common habit of asking for money—Haydon, indeed, was thought by some to have sat to Charles Lamb as a model for Ralph Bigod, Esq., captain of the mighty "men who borrow"—and at the last a mutual estrangement. On hearing of Keats's death Haydon summed up his character thus:

A genius more purely poetical never existed. In fireside conversation he was weak and inconsequent, but he was in his glory in the fields. . . . He was the most unselfish of human creatures; unadapted to the world, he cared not for himself, and put himself to any inconvenience for the sake of his friends. He was haughty, and had a fierce hatred of rank; but he had a kind heart, and would have shared his fortune with any one who wanted it. [Keats, by the way, had quarrelled with Haydon over the repayment of a loan.] He had an exquisite sense of humour, and too refined a notion of female purity to bear the little sweet arts of love with patience. . . . He began life full of hopes, fury, impetuous, and ungovernable, expecting the world to fall at once beneath his powers. Unable to bear the sneers of ignorance nor the attacks of envy, he began to despond, and flew to dissipation as a relief. For six weeks he was scarcely sober, and—to show what a man does to gratify his appetites when they get the better of him—once covered his tongue and throat as far as he could with cayenne pepper, in order to appreciate the "delicious coldness of claret in all its glory"—his own expression.

I should like to be as sure as are some others, of Keats's own time and of the present, that this is a distorted view of the man's failings; they may well be somewhat exaggerated, yet Haydon had for the most part a wicked penetration into character, and his words here ring remarkably true. Nor is it the only place in which he asserts that Keats was beaten down by the cruelty of the reviewers, leading us to think that Byron's cynical rhyme on the "fiery particle" "snuffed out by an article" may have contained just a grain of truth. And as for the cayenne pepper, is it much more than a childish illustration of the thought repeated in many a verse—to "burst Joy's grape against his palate fine"? After all this is but the frailer, and, so to speak, ephemeral, side of Keats; unfortunately, his associations were not of a kind to help him to overcome the initial lack of training, by correcting his flaws of taste and egotistic enthusiasm, and by purging what I have called his Elizabethan spontaneity of its cockney dross. As Wordsworth wrote in his patronising way: "How is Keats? He is a youth of promise, too great for the sorry company he keeps."

The wonder of it is that he grew so rapidly, and that so large a part of the volume of 1820 should have attained the true and lofty liberties of the spirit. In many aspects he stands curiously apart from his age. One feels this in his attitude toward nature, which in his verse is still

unsubjected to the destinies of mankind. With Wordsworth and Shelley, even with Byron, some thought of man's sufferings and aspirations rises between the poet's eye and the vision of Nature, but with Keats she is still a great primeval force, inhuman and self-centred, beautiful, and sublime, and cruel, by turns. One catches this note at times in the earlier poems, as in the largeness and aloofness of such a picture as this:

> On a lone winter evening, when the frost
> Has wrought a silence.

It speaks with greater clearness in the later poems—in the elfin call of the nightingale's song,

> The same that hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn;

and in the imagery, calling us back to times before man's feebler creation, of that "sad place" where

> Crag jutting forth to crag, and rocks, that seemed
> Ever as if just rising from a sleep,
> Forehead to forehead held their monstrous horns.

One has the feeling that the poet's mind is in immediate contact with the object described, and the imagination of the reader is shocked from self-complacency by a kind of sympathetic surprise. It is at bottom a mark of that unperverted and untheorised sincerity whose presence condones so many faults in the Elizabethan writers, and whose

absence mars so many brilliant qualities in the contemporaries of Keats.

But more particularly I see this backward-reaching kinship of Keats in his constant association of the ideas of beauty (or love) and death. In the dramatists that association attained its climax in the broken cry of Webster, which rings and sobs like a paroxysm of jealous rage against the all-embracing power:

> Cover her face ; mine eyes dazzle : she died young,—

but everywhere in them it is present or implied. Of their thirst for beauty there is no need to give separate examples; nor yet of their constant brooding on the law of mutability. They cannot get away from the remembrance of life's brevity:

> On pain of death, let no man name death to me:
> *It is a word infinitely terrible.*

But for the tedium of repetition one might go through Keats's volume of 1820, and show how completely the pattern of that book is wrought on the same background of ideas. Perhaps the most striking illustration may be found in those two stanzas which relate how Isabella in the lonely forest unearths the body of her buried lover:

> She gazed into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
> One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
> Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
> Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
> Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,

Like to a native lily of the dell:
Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
To dig more fervently than misers can.

Soon she turn'd up a soilèd glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies,
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:
Than 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair.

Every age has its peculiar adaptation of this universal theme, and chants in its own way the everlasting hymeneal of beauty and death; but in these stanzas there is something that calls the mind back to the poetry of Webster and Ford. This poignant meeting of the shapes of loveliness and decay is the inheritance of the middle ages, which in England more especially was carried over into the new birth and made gorgeous with all the cunning splendours of the Renaissance. Keats did not learn his art from the real antiquity. The Greeks, too, had their version of the theme, and in the story of Persephone and Dis gave it its most perfect mythological form. But its interest with them lay primarily in its ethical associations, and the Powers of beauty and death were minor agents only in the great moral drama moved by the supreme unwritten laws. No Greek could have so gloated over the purely physical contrast of ideas—"A skull upon a mat of roses

lying"—or put into it the same hungering emotion, as did Keats in these stanzas that follow the forest scene in *Isabella:*

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
And then the prize was all for Isabel:
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringèd lash; the smearèd loam
With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away:—and still she comb'd, and kept
Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd, and wept.

Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dews
Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully,—
She wrapp'd it up; and for its tomb did choose
A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

To see how far Keats is from the spirit of Greece, we need only turn from this last stanza to the scene of Antigone, in the play of Sophocles, treading the last road for the love of one dead, and looking for the last time on the light of the sun and

never again any more. She, too, bids farewell to the bright things of the world, the springs of Dirce and the grove of Thebes, but it is not in the language of Isabella.

The same music wrung from the transience of lovely things runs like a monotone through the other poems of Keats's great volume, but in a different key. The incongruity (as it appears, yet it lies at the bottom of human thought) intrudes even into *The Eve of St. Agnes*, with the opening image of the benumbed beadsman among the sculptured dead and with the closing return to the same contrast. In the Odes it is subdued to a musing regret—heard pensively in the *Ode to a Nightingale:*

> Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
> To take into the air my quiet breath;
> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy!
> Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
> To thy high requiem become a sod;—

speaking with a still more chastened beauty in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn:*

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!—

uttered with greater poignancy in the *Ode on Melancholy:*

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.

It is the secret, for those who can read that mystery, of what is to many his most perfect work, the ballad of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.*

From these ideal poems one turns naturally to the letters in which the fever and unrest, the glimpses of philosophy, and the broken hopes of Keats's actual life are expressed with such pathetic earnestness. The picture that results is of a strong man fighting against what he calls, with some self-depreciation, "a horrid Morbidity of Temperament." There is much to lament in this revelation never meant for the public; but in the end the sense of the man's greatness, the feeling of his reliance on the divine call, outweighs the impression of his painful susceptibility, and of his struggles to free himself from "the mire of a bad reputation." He may write on one day: "My name with the literary fashionables is vulgar, I am a weaver-boy to them, a tragedy would lift me out

of this mess"; but the truer Keats is to be found in his moments of proud independence: "I value more the privilege of seeing great things in loneliness than the fame of a Prophet." *Great things in loneliness!* These were to him, as almost every page of the letters would prove, *the mighty abstract Idea of Beauty* and the ever-present consciousness of death. The pity of it is that these relentless powers should have passed for him from the realm of reflection to the coarse realities of life, and that the experience of his few years (they were only twenty-five) should have been torn by them as by a warring destiny. It was inevitable that this contention should take the form of love; nay, from the beginning, in his flippant, half-frightened allusions to the other sex, one feels that he is laying himself open to the recrimination of the deity. "I am certain," he says, "I have not a right feeling toward women"; and again, with a kind of foreboding, he avows that his idea of beauty "stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness." Through all the correspondence his thought seems to be leaping on as if pursued by a dreaded Necessity; one hears the footsteps of the spurned goddess behind him. So, he was overtaken at last, and his brief story was made another example of the ways of Nemesis. The letters in which he pours out the agony of his love for Fanny Brawne resemble Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* more than anything else in literature. They have the same uncontrolled passion, and the

same unfortunate note of vulgarity, due not so much to the exuberance of his emotion as to the lack of any corresponding force in the woman. The flaccidity of her temperament deprives the episode of tragic ideality, and lowers it to the common things of the street. It even changes his master-vision to something approaching a sickly sentimentalism. "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks," he writes, "your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute." It helped to kill the poet in him,—save for that last sonnet, his wild swan-song, written on his journey to Rome and a Roman grave:

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

As it seemed to him in those evil days when disease had laid hold of his body, Death was the victor in the contention of Fate. "If I should die," he wrote to Fanny Brawne, "I have left no

immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered." And the epitaph which he composed for himself—how well it is remembered!—was carved on stone: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." But to the world, not Death but eternal Loveliness carried the palm. We think of him as the Marcellus of literature, who could not break through the *fata aspera*, and as one of "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown"; and still we know that he accomplished a glorious destiny. His promise was greater than the achievement of others.

And yet a word to avoid misunderstanding, for it is so easy in these voyages of criticism to bring back a one-sided report, and to emphasise overmuch the broad aspects of a land while neglecting the nicer points of distinction. Thus, in pointing out the kinship of Keats to the Elizabethans, we should not forget that he is, like all men, still of his own age. By his depth and sincerity he differs, indeed, from certain other writers of the century who deal with the same subjects—from William Morris, for example, whose *Earthly Paradise* runs on the strange companionship of love and death with almost a frivolous persistence; but he is still far from the brave furor and exultation of the great passages in Marlowe. Again he has more than once imitated the simplicity of

William Browne—notably in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* where the lines to the "bold lover" already quoted are evidently an echo of a passage in the *Pastorals:*

> Here from the rest a lovely shepherd's boy
> Sits piping on a hill, as if his joy
> Would still endure, or else that age's frost
> Should never make him think what he had lost.

(Which is itself borrowed from Sir Philip Sidney's "Shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old.") But who does not feel that the young beauty of Keats is different from that first careless rapture, which has gone never to be recovered? Perhaps the very fact that he is speaking a language largely foreign to his own generation adds a personal eagerness, a touch at times of feverish straining, to his song.

I have already intimated that side by side with the superb zest of beauty there is another note in the dramatists which Keats rarely or never attains. That note is caught in such lines as Ford's

> For he is like to something I remember
> A great while since, a long, long time ago;

and always when it is struck, a curtain is drawn from behind the fretful human actors and we look beyond into infinite space. On the other hand, there is but little in Keats of the rich humanity and high passions that for the most part fill the Elizabethan stage. The pathos of *Isabella*

is the nearest approach in him to that deeper source of poetry. Keats himself was aware that this background was lacking to his work, and harps on the subject continually. He perceived dimly that the motto of his faith,

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
> Ye know on earth; and all ye need to know,

was but a partial glimpse of the reality. Had he been sufficiently a Greek to read Plato, he might have been carried beyond that imperfect view; even the piteous incompleteness of his own life might have laid bare to him the danger lurking in its fair deception. As it is, his letters are filled with vague yearnings for a clearer knowledge; he is, he says, as one "writing at random, straining after particles of light in the midst of a great darkness." Unfortunately, inevitably perhaps, when he came to put his half-digested theories into practice, he turned, not to the moral drama of the Greeks or to the passionate human nature of the Elizabethans, but to the humanitarian philosophy that was in the air about him; and, accepting this, he fell into a crude dualism. "I find there is no worthy pursuit," he writes, "but the idea of doing some good to the world. . . . I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy."

It has been generally supposed that Keats abandoned his unfinished *Hyperion*, and started

to rewrite it in the form of a vision, through dissatisfaction with the Miltonic inversions of language in the earlier draft and through the influence of Dante's *Commedia*. That view is demonstrably true in part, but I think the real motive for the change goes deeper. There is, in fact, an inherent contradiction in his treatment of the theme which rendered a completion of the original poem almost impracticable. The subject is the overthrow of the Titans by the new race of gods—Saturn succumbing to the arms of his own child and Hyperion, Lord of the Sun, fleeing before Apollo of the golden bow and the lyre; it is the old dynasty of formless powers, driven into oblivion by the new creators of form and order. That was the design, but it is easy to see how in the execution the poet's dominant idea overmastered him and turned his intended pæan on the birth of the new beauty into a sonorous dirge for the passing away of the old. Our imagination is indeed lord of the past and not of the future. The instinctive sympathy of the poet for the fallen deities is felt in the very first line of the poem, and it never changes. Consider the picture of Hyperion's home:

> His palace bright,
> Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold,
> And touch'd with shade of bronzèd obelisks,
> Glared a blood-red through all its thousand courts,
> Arches, and domes, and fiery galleries;
> And all its curtains of Aurorian clouds
> Flush'd angerly—

or consider the apparition of Hyperion himself:

> He look'd upon them all,
> And in each face he saw a gleam of light,
> But splendider in Saturn's, whose hoar locks
> Shone like the bubbling foam about a keel
> When the prow sweeps into a midnight cove.
> In pale and silver silence they remain'd,
> Till suddenly a splendour, like the morn,
> Pervaded all the beetling gloomy steeps,
> All the sad spaces of oblivion,
> And every gulf, and every chasm old,
> And every height, and every sullen depth,
> Voiceless, or hoarse with loud tormented
> streams: . . .
> It was Hyperion;—

are there any words left in the poet's armory after this to describe the glory of Apollo? As a matter of fact, the third book in which he introduces the young usurper is distinctly below the other two in force and beauty, and Keats knew it and broke off in the middle. That was, probably, in September of 1819; about two months later he was engaged in reshaping his work into *The Fall of Hyperion*, which was also left unfinished and was not published until 1856. In its altered form the poem is cast into a vision. The poet finds himself in a garden of rare flowers and delicious fruits. These vanish away and in their place is "an old sanctuary with roof august," wherein is a mystic shrine and a woman ministering thereat. Her name had once been Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, the mother of the Muses, but now she

is called Moneta, that is to say, the guide or admonisher—alas, for all the change means! The poet cries to her for help:

> "High Prophetess," said I, "purge off,
> Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film."
> "None can usurp this height," returned that shade,
> "But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery, and will not let them rest."

But are there not others, cries the poet, who have felt the agony of the world, and have laboured for its redemption? Where are they that they are not here? And then:

> "Those whom thou spakest of are no visionaries,"
> Rejoin'd that voice; "they are no dreamers weak;
> They seek no wonder but the human ace,
> No music but a happy-noted voice:
> They come not here, they have no thought to come;
> And thou art here, for thou art less than they.
> What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
> To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing."

And thereupon, in a vision, she unfolds before his eyes the fall of Hyperion and the progress of humanity symbolised in the advent of Apollo. To compare this mutilated version with the poem Keats had written under the instinctive inspiration of his genius is one of the saddest tasks of the student of literature.

No, it was not any dislike of Miltonic idioms or any impulse from Dante that brought about this change in his ambition; it was the working of the ineluctable Time-spirit. His early associations

with Leigh Hunt had prepared him for this treachery to his nature, but there was a poverty in the imagination of those cockney enthusiasts for progress which would have saved him ultimately from their influence. It was the richer note of Wordsworth, the still sad music of humanity running through that poet's mighty song, that wrought the fatal revolution. As early as May of 1818 he had written to a friend (and the passage is worthy of quoting at some length):

> My Branchings out therefrom have been numerous: one of them is the consideration of Wordsworth's genius . . . and how he differs from Milton. And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Milton's apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or not than Wordsworth: and whether Wordsworth has in truth epic passion, and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song. [After some wandering there follows the famous comparison of human life to a large mansion of many apartments, which may be used as a key to the symbolism of the later *Hyperion*, and then] We see not the balance of good and evil; we are in a mist, *we* are now in that state, we feel the "Burden of the Mystery." To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. He is a genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light in them. Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind.

The Fall of Hyperion is nothing less than the attempt of Keats, against the native grain of his genius, to pass from the inspiration of Milton and Shakespeare to that of Wordsworth. The thought of the two poems, and of the living beauty of the one and the disrelish of the other, brings up the remembrance of that story, told by Edward Fitz-Gerald from a Persian poet, of the traveller in the desert who dips his hand into a spring of water and drinks. By and by comes another who drinks of the same spring from an earthen bowl, and departs, leaving his bowl behind him. The first traveller takes it up for another draught, but finds that the water which had tasted sweet from his own hand is now bitter from the earthen bowl. He wonders; but a voice from heaven tells him the clay from which the bowl is made was once *Man*, and can never lose the bitter flavour of mortality.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

THERE is a certain embarrassment in dealing with Franklin as a man of letters, for the simple reason that he was never, in the strict sense of the word, concerned with letters at all.[1] He lived in an age of writers, and of writing he did his full share; but one cannot go through the ten volumes of his collected works, or the three volumes of the admirable new edition now printing under the care of Mr. Smyth,[2] without feeling the presence of an intellect enormously energetic, but directed to practical rather than literary ends. Were it not for the consummate ease with which his mind moved, there would indeed be something oppressive in this display of

[1] In celebration of Franklin's Bicentenary, January 17, 1906, the *Independent* printed a number of papers on the various aspects of his activity. The subject allotted to me was *Franklin in Literature*.

[2] *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*. Collected and Edited, with a Life and Introduction, by Albert Henry Smyth. 10 vols. (Three only were published at this date.) New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905-6.—The text is here amended much for the better. But an undue squeamishness has led the editor to omit writings important for a right knowledge of Franklin, and the notes are unsatisfactory.

unresting energy. Politics, religion, ethics, science, agriculture, navigation, hygiene, the mechanical arts, journalism, music, education—in all these fields he was almost equally at home, and every subject came from under his touch simplified and enlarged; on his tomb might have been engraved the epitaph, *Nullum quod tetigit non renovavit.* He had perhaps the most clarifying and renovating intellect of that keenly alert age, and to know his writings is to be familar with half the activities of the eighteenth century. Yet his pen still lacked that final spell which transmutes life into literature. He was ever engaged in enforcing a present lesson or producing an immediate result, and his busy brain could not pause long enough to listen to those hidden powers that all the while murmur in remote voices the symbolic meaning of the puppets and the puppet-actions of this world. Like his contemporary Voltaire, and to a far higher degree, his personality was greater than any separate production of his brain. And so, as the real charm of Voltaire is most felt in the Correspondence, where there is no attempt to escape from his own personal interests, in the same way the better approach to Franklin's works is through the selected edition so arranged by Mr. Bigelow as to form a continuous and familiar narrative of his life.[1]

[1] *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Written by Himself.* By John Bigelow. 3 vols. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. Fifth Edition, 1905.

But something is still wanting. Franklin the man is so much larger than Franklin the writer that, like his other contemporary, Dr. Johnson, he needs a Boswell to give him his true place in literature. Some indication of what such a work might be we have in Parton's solid and self-respecting volumes.[1] Here the practical achievements of the man, the supreme versatility of his mind, his dominance over the world, and his own powers of expression are so brought together as to create a figure almost comparable to the great personalities that arise from the memoirs of Boswell and Lockhart and Froude. But Parton laboured under certain disabilities. He had, in the first place, to proceed from a very imperfect edition of Franklin's writings, which did not even include a good text of the Autobiography; and he lacked something of the finished literary skill and psychological insight required for his task. His Life is, I venture to say, despite certain misapprehensions of Franklin's character, the most interesting work of its kind yet produced in this country, vastly superior to the mutilated lives of Franklin that have since been turned out for flighty readers, but it still leaves room for a book which might be a possession forever, an honour to American letters. And I have in mind at least one of our younger historians who could

[1] *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin.* By James Parton. 2 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1897. (First published 1864.)

thus, if his other self-imposed tasks did not prevent, enroll his name among the memorable biographers.[1]

For Franklin would meet such a biographer more than half way. Whether from some histrionic instinct in his own nature, or from some secret sympathy between his individual will and the forces that play upon mankind, the supreme moments of his career follow one another like the artificial tableaux of a drama. As a man of science his prime achievement was to discover the identity of lightning and the electric fluid. *Eripuit cælo fulmen sceptrumque tyrannis*, wrote Turgot of that famous event, having in mind the tyrant superstitions of both heaven and earth; and it is peculiarly appropriate that this step in what may be called the secularisation of celestial phenomena should have come from the champion of political liberty. Who was better fitted than this prophet of common sense to give an answer to Virgil's question:

> An te, genitor, cum fulmina torques,
> Nequiquam horremus, cæcique in nubibus ignes
> Terrificant animos et inania murmura miscent?

Not from himself but from others comes the story of his dramatic experiment. The time is a day in June of 1752, when a thunder-storm is threaten-

[1] As certain humorous critics have intimated that only modesty prevented the naming of this gentleman, I may say that I had in mind Mr. William Garrott Brown.

ing. The scene is in the purlieus of Philadelphia. Thither Franklin and his son, fearing the ridicule of their neighbours, steal out unobserved. There they send up a silk kite constructed for the purpose and then seek the shelter of an open abandoned cowshed. The cord of the kite, except the end of non-conducting silk which they hold in their hands, is hempen, and will become, when wet, an excellent conductor. At the juncture of the hemp and the silk is a metal key, which is connected with a Leyden jar. The storm breaks and a thunder-cloud passes directly over the kite, but still there is no sign of electricity. The philosopher is in despair and begins to fear that the fine theories he has spread abroad will end in mockery, when, suddenly, the fibres of the hempen cord stand on end. He applies his knuckle to the key, feels the customary shock, and knows that he can justify himself in the eyes of Europe.

Even more striking, if less picturesque, is the scene which may stand as the climax of his long struggle to preserve the union of England and the colonies. It happened in 1774, when he was in London as Commissioner for Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and when the feeling of irritation on both sides was at the fever point. A friendly member of Parliament had put into Franklin's hands certain letters in which Governor Hutchinson, of Massachusetts, though a native-born American, had urged the most exasperating measures of oppression against the colonies. These

letters Franklin, by permission, had transmitted to Boston, where they naturally raised a tempest of indignation. Complications ensued in London, a fatal duel was fought, and Franklin, though his part in the affair was perfectly honourable, had given an occasion to his enemies for abusive defamation. And they did not miss the opportunity. A petition had been laid before the Privy Council to remove Governor Hutchinson, and Franklin was summoned to meet that exalted body in the so-called Cockpit. "All the courtiers," Franklin wrote home afterward, "were invited, as to an entertainment, and there never was such an appearance of Privy Councillors on any occasion, not less than thirty-five, besides an immense crowd of other auditors. . . The Solicitor-General [Mr. Wedderburn] then went into what he called a history of the province for the last ten years, and bestowed plenty of abuse upon it, mingled with encomium on the governors. But the favourite part of his discourse was levelled at your agent, who stood there the butt of his invective ribaldry for near an hour, not a single Lord adverting to the impropriety and indecency of treating a public messenger in so ignominious a manner. . . If he had done a wrong, in obtaining and transmitting the letters, that was not the tribunal where he was to be accused and tried. The cause was already before the Chancellor. Not one of their Lordships checked and recalled the orator to the business before them, but, on

the contrary, a very few excepted, they seemed to enjoy highly the entertainment, and frequently burst out in loud applauses. This part of his speech was thought so good, that they have since printed it, in order to defame me everywhere, and particularly to destroy my reputation on your side of the water; but the grosser parts of the abuse are omitted, appearing, I suppose, in their own eyes, too foul to be seen on paper." It would be interesting to know what the Council thought worthy to expunge. As printed, the speech of Wedderburn was sufficiently vituperative, one would think:

I hope, my Lords, he exclaimed, with thundering voice and vehement beating of his fist on the cushion before him—I hope, my Lords, you will mark and brand the man, for the honour of this country, of Europe, and of mankind. . . . He has forfeited all the respect of societies and of men. Into what companies will he hereafter go with an unembarrassed face, or the honest intrepidity of virtue? Men will watch him with a jealous eye; they will hide their papers from him, and lock up their escritoirs. He will henceforth esteem it a libel to be called *a man of letters; homo trium literarum* (i.e., *fur*, thief!) . . . He not only took away the letters of one brother; but kept himself concealed till he nearly occasioned the murder of the other. It is impossible to read his account, expressive of the coolest and most deliberate malice, without horror. . . . Amidst these tragical events, of one person nearly murdered, of another answerable for the issue, of a worthy governor hurt in his dearest interests, the fate of America in suspense; here is a man who, with the utmost insensibility of

remorse, stands up and vows himself the author of all. I can compare it only to Zanga, in Dr. Young's *Revenge:*

> "Know then 't was ——— *I.*
> *I* forged the letters—*I* disposed the picture—
> *I* hated, *I* despised, and *I* destroy."

I ask, my Lords, whether the revengeful temper attributed, by poetic fiction only, to the bloody African is not surpassed by the coolness and apathy of the wily American?

The scene is dramatic in the extreme—the vociferous, malignant accuser, the lords gloating over their victim, nodding approval to the bully and breaking out into laughter when the slander was most virulent; and Franklin, all the while standing at one end of the room in the recess by the chimney, erect, motionless, with countenance, so an eyewitness described it, as unchangeable as if carved out of wood. He would seem almost to have had in view the vicissitudes of his own life, when years before, as a young man, he had written his character of "Cato" for the *Weekly Mercury:* "His aspect is sweetened with humanity and benevolence, and at the same time emboldened with resolution, equally free from a diffident bashfulness and an unbecoming assurance. The consciousness of his own innate worth and unshaken integrity renders him calm and undaunted in the presence of the most great and powerful, and upon the most extraordinary occasions." But Franklin had his malicious side. In the Cockpit he wore, we are told, a full dress-suit of spotted Manchester velvet. On a memorable day, just

four years later, when the treaty with France was to be signed, he took pains to appear in the same conspicuous garb—he was ever a humourist, this *wily American!* For the rest, the epigram of Horace Walpole is sufficiently well known:

> Sarcastic Sawney, swol'n with spite and prate,
> On silent Franklin poured his venal hate.
> The calm philosopher, without reply,
> Withdrew, and gave his country liberty.

Franklin, I believe, never met Dr. Johnson; and this is a pity, for the clash between the dictator's burly insolence and Franklin's irresistible wit would have furnished an unforgettable pendant to the ignominy of the Cockpit. He was, however, brought face to face with the only other personality entirely of that age which was comparable to his own. In 1778 Voltaire, an old man tottering to the grave, revisited Paris to accept the homage of the city, and to die. The American envoys were received in his chamber, and there the patriarch of the terrible new faith that was permeating society pronounced a solemn blessing upon the representative of the rising generation. "When I gave my benediction," he wrote a few days later, "to the grandson of the sage and illustrious Franklin, the most honourable man of America, I spoke only these words, *God and Liberty!* All who were present shed tears." But the petted spokesmen of the century were to meet on a more eminent stage and in a more noteworthy

scene. At a public session of the Academy of Sciences the two "philosophers" sat together on the platform, the lodestone of all eyes. What happened can best be related in the words of John Adams, a curious and jealous observer:

> Voltaire and Franklin were both present, and there presently arose a general cry that M. Voltaire and M. Franklin should be introduced to each other. This was done, and they bowed and spoke to each other. This was no satisfaction; there must be something more. Neither of our philosophers seemed to divine what was wished or expected. They, however, took each other by the hand; but this was not enough. The clamour continued until the exclamation came out, "*Il faut s'embrasser à la Française!*" The two aged actors upon this great theatre of philosophy and frivolity then embraced each other by hugging one another in their arms and kissing each other's cheeks, and then the tumult subsided. And the cry immediately spread throughout the kingdom, and I suppose over all Europe, "*Qu' il était charmant de voir embrasser Solon et Sophocle!*"

This great theatre of philosophy and frivolity! Dear sir, it is the world of the eighteenth century you are naming so petulantly, the stage on which you are yourself playing a lesser but no mean part. Nor would it be easy to find a tableau more strikingly significant of the powers that had already given freedom to America and were soon to set France and all Europe ablaze. It might seem as if the Dæmon of history had chosen Franklin to be the protagonist in the successive acts of that drama of mingled tragedy and comedy

wherein the people of the nations were shuffled about as supernumeraries.

Other scenes might be quoted as minor episodes in that stupendous drama—the presentation of Franklin to his Majesty Louis XVI., when Franklin's wig played so comical a part; the receipt of the news of Burgoyne's surrender; and, long before these, the interrogation of Franklin before the British Parliament. For the last and most beautiful scene we must pass on to another parliament which was sitting in a far less sumptuous hall. It was in September of 1787, and the Convention of the States at Philadelphia had, after long uncertainties, drafted the Constitution which was to justify and make perpetual the labours of which Franklin had borne so heavy a share. The story is related by Madison that, while "the last members were signing, Dr. Franklin, looking toward the president's chair, at the back of which a rising sun happened to be painted, observed to a few members near him that painters had found it difficult to distinguish in their art a rising from a setting sun. 'I have,' he said, 'often and often, in the course of the session, and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the president, without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting; but now, at length, I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun.'" So it was the venerable man pronounced upon the work of his generation and

saluted those who were about to take up the burden.

Franklin was not precisely a man of letters, yet his life is almost literature, and out of it might be made one of the great books. Not only do the salient events of his career take on this dramatic form which is already a kind of literary expression, but he goes further than that and leaves the task of the biographer half done, by using language as one of his chief instruments of activity. Even the sallies of his wit were a power, often consciously used, in the practical world. So in Paris, during the dark days of the war, a well-placed jest here and there was surprisingly effective in keeping up the confidence of our French friends. When some one told him that Howe had taken Philadelphia, he was ready with the retort: "I beg your pardon, sir, Philadelphia has taken Howe." And again when the story of another defeat was disseminated by the British Ambassador, and Franklin was asked if it were true, he replied: "No, monsieur, it is not a truth; it is only a Stormont." And throughout Paris a "stormont" passed for a lie. At another time some one accused the Americans of cowardice for firing from behind the stone walls of Lexington: "Sir," said Franklin, "I beg to inquire if those same walls had not two sides to them?" Best known of all is his pun, bravest of all puns, in the Continental Congress when there was hesitation over signing the

Declaration of Independence. "We must be unanimous," said Hancock; "there must be no pulling different ways; we must all hang together." "Yes," added Franklin, "we must, indeed, all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

But his pen was as ready a servant as his tongue, and how diligently he trained himself to this end every reader of the Autobiography knows. From childhood he was an eager and critical student, and few pages of his memoirs are written with more warmth of recollection than those which tell of the books he contrived to buy, Bunyan's works first of all. He seems to think that the *Spectator* had the predominating influence on his style, and apparently he was still under sixteen when an odd volume of that work set him to studying systematically. His method was to read one of the essays and then after a number of days to rewrite it from a few written hints, striving to make his own language as correct and elegant as the original; or, again, he turned an essay into verse and back again into prose from memory. "I also," he adds, "sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavoured to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and complete the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards, with the original, I discovered many faults and

amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious." His method—on the whole one of the best of disciplines, better, I think, than the system of themes now employed in our colleges—could scarcely have been anything for Franklin save a precocious discovery, although it had, of course, been used long before his day. Cicero tells how the orator Crassus had begun to form himself on a plan not essentially different, but turned from this to the more approved exercise of converting the Greek writers into equivalent Latin. *Vertere Græca in Latinum veteres nostri oratores optimum judicabant*, said Quintilian; and Franklin's language would have gained in richness if he, too, had proceeded a step further and undergone the discipline of comparing his English with the classics.[1] As it is, he made himself one

[1] That venerable schoolmaster, Roger Ascham, had his way of elaborating this method: "First, let him teach the childe, cherefullie and plainlie, the cause, and matter of the letter [of Cicero's]: then, let him construe it into Englishe, so oft, as the childe may easilie carie awaie the vnderstanding of it: Lastlie, parse it ouer perfitlie. This done thus, let the childe, by and by, both construe and parse it ouer againe: so, that it may appeare, that the childe douteth in nothing, that his master taught him before. After this, the childe must take a paper

of the masters of that special style of the eighteenth century which concealed a good deal of art under apparent, even obtrusive, negligences. He professed to model himself on Addison, but his language is really closer to the untrimmed and vigorous sentences of Defoe. And in spirit his actual affinity is more with Swift than with the *Spectator;* or, rather, he lies between the two, with something harsher than the suave impertinence of Addison yet without the terrible savagery of the Dean. In particular he affected Swift's two weapons of irony and the hoax, and, if he did not quite make literature with them, he at least made history, which his predecessor could not do. Sometimes he was content to borrow an invention bodily—"convey the wise it call"—as when he badgered a rival almanac maker by foretelling the date of his death and then calmly proving the truth of the prophecy out of the poor fellow's angry protestations. And entirely in the vein of Swift, if not so palpably stolen, are a number of his political pamphlets, notably, in the way of irony, the *Rules for*

booke, and sitting in some place, where no man shall prompe him, by him self, let him translate into Englishe his former lesson. Then shewing it to his master, let the master take from him his latin booke, and pausing an houre, at the least, than let the childe translate his owne Englishe into latin againe, in an other paper booke. When the childe bringeth it, turned into latin, the master must compare it with *Tullies* booke, and laie them both togither.

Reducing a Great Empire to a Small One. As for his hoaxes they were innumerable and astonishingly successful. They all point back to the incorrigible Dean of St. Patrick's, although one of the most famous of them was probably suggested by Walpole's fictitious letter of Frederick the Great, which drove Rousseau one stage further into lunacy. To expose the hollowness of Great Britain's claim to absolute ownership of America because that country had been colonised by Englishmen, Franklin took advantage of the ancient German settlement of England and published a so-called *Edict of the King of Prussia.* The result he tells in a letter to his son (October 6, 1773):

> What made it the more noticed here was, that people in reading it were, as the phrase is, *taken in*, till they had got half through it, and imagined it a real edict, to which mistake I suppose the King of Prussia's *character* must have contributed. I was down at Lord Le Despencer's, when the post brought that day's papers. Mr. Whitehead was there, too (Paul Whitehead, the author of *Manners*), who runs early through all the papers, and tells the company what he finds remarkable. He had them in another room, and we were chatting in the breakfast parlour, when he came running in to us, out of breath, with the paper in his hand. Here! says he, here's news for ye! *Here's the King of Prussia, claiming a right to this kingdom!* All stared, and I as much as anybody; and he went on to read it. When he had read two or three paragraphs, a gentleman present said, *Damn his impudence, I dare say we shall hear by next post that he is upon his march with one hundred thousand*

men to back this. Whitehead, who is very shrewd, soon after began to smoke it, and looking in my face, said, *I 'll be hanged if this is not some of your American jokes upon us.* The reading went on, and ended with abundance of laughing, and a general verdict that it was a fair hit: and the piece was cut out of the paper and preserved in my Lord's collection.

Other hoaxes were not so readily detected, and have even crept into sober history and criticism. There is the notorious *Speech of Polly Baker*, which the Abbé Raynal quoted to illustrate a point of law in his *Histoire des Deux Indes*, and which he refused to expunge when informed of its source. "Very well, Doctor," said he with perfect nonchalance; "I had rather relate your stories than other men's truths." And there is the no less notorious proposal for a *New Version of the Bible*, in which Franklin, under the plea of modernising the text, altered the first six verses of Job into a satire on monarchical government. The solemn comment of Matthew Arnold on the passage is a delightful piece of unconscious humour:

I remember the relief with which, after long feeling the sway of Franklin's imperturbable common sense, I came upon a project of his for a new version of the Book of Job, to replace the old version, the style of which, says Franklin, has become obsolete and thence less agreeable. "I give," he continues, "a few verses, which may serve as a sample of the kind of version I would recommend." We all recollect the famous verse in our translation: "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for naught?" Franklin makes this: "Does your

Majesty imagine that Job's good conduct is the effect of mere personal attachment and affection?" I well remember how, when I first read that, I drew a deep breath of relief, and said to myself, "After all, there is a stretch of humanity beyond Franklin's victorious good sense."

Alas for the proud wit of man! These stumblings of a great critic may be a lesson in humility for us, the children of a later day. And after all, to use his own phrase, it was only a slight misplacement of sarcasm; he did not mean Franklin's merry skit, but was speaking, prophetically, of that pretentious humbug, the *Revised Version*.

Later in life, especially during his stay in Paris, Franklin's satire became even mellower, and he took up again a form of writing in which he had early excelled. This was the *Bagatelle*, as he called it, the little apologue written in the lightest vein, yet containing often the very heart of his genial philosophy. Such were the *Epitaph on Miss Shipley's Squirrel*, *The Ephemera*, *The Whistle*, *The Handsome and Deformed Leg*, and the *Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout*, to name no others. How neatly turned they all are, how wise and gracious and tender; how they show what was lost to pure literature by the exigencies of his busy life. I cannot pass on without quoting the least of these, the letter to a young friend *On the Loss of Her American Squirrel*. It belongs with that long list of poems and epitaphs, half playful and half pathetic, on

the pets of dear women, beginning with Lesbia's sparrow:

I lament with you most sincerely the unfortunate end of poor Mungo. Few squirrels were better accomplished, for he had a good education, travelled far, and seen much of the world. As he had the honour of being, for his virtues, your favourite, he should not go, like common Skuggs, without an elegy or an epitaph. Let us give him one in the monumental style and measure, which, being neither prose, nor verse, is perhaps the properest for grief; since to use common language would look as if we were not affected, and to make rhymes would seem trifling in sorrow.

EPITAPH.

Alas! poor Mungo!
Happy wert thou, hadst thou known
Thy own felicity.
Remote from the fierce bald eagle,
Tyrant of thy native woods,
Thou hadst naught to fear from his piercing talons,
Nor from the murdering gun
Of the thoughtless sportsman.

Safe in thy wired castle,
Grimalkin never could annoy thee.
Daily wert thou fed with the choicest viands,
By the fair hand of an indulgent mistress;
But, discontented,
Thou wouldst have more freedom.
Too soon, alas! didst thou obtain it;
And wandering,

Thou art fallen by the fangs of wanton, cruel
Ranger!
Learn hence,
Ye who blindly seek more liberty,

Whether subjects, sons, squirrels, or daughters,
That apparent restraint may be real protection,
Yielding peace and plenty
With security.

You see, my dear miss, how much more decent and proper this broken style is than if we were to say by way of epitaph—

Here Skugg
Lies snug
As a bug
In a rug.

And yet, perhaps, there are people in the world of so little feeling as to think that this would be a good enough epitaph for poor Mungo.

So it is that speech and action blend together inextricably to form this fascinating literary figure. He moves through the whole length of the eighteenth century, serene and self-possessed, a philosopher and statesman yet a fellow of infinite jest, a shrewd economist yet capable of the tenderest generosities. There was a large admixture of earth in the image, no doubt. His wit was often coarse, if not obscene, and, as his latest editor observes, leaves a long "smudgy trail" behind it. Not a little that he wrote and that still exists in manuscript is too rank to be printed. One might wish all this away, and yet I do not know; somehow the thought of that big animal body completes our impression of the overflowing bountifulness of his nature. If wishing were having, I would choose rather that he had not made of his Autobiography so singular a document in petty

prudence and economy. Nothing in that record is more typical than the remark on his habit of bringing home the paper he purchased through the streets on a wheelbarrow—"to show," he adds, "that I was not above my business." And for economy, one remembers his visit to the old lady in London who lived as a religious recluse, and his comment: "She looked pale, but was never sick; and I give it as another instance on how small an income life and health may be supported." Possibly the character of his memoirs would have changed if he had continued them into his later years; but I am inclined rather to think that the discrepancy between the breadth of his activities and the narrowness of his professed ideals would have become still more evident by such an extension. The truth is they only exaggerate a real deficiency in his character; there was, after all, a stretch of humanity beyond Franklin's victorious good sense.

We feel this chiefly in his religious convictions; it is pressed upon us by contrast with the only other American who was intellectually his peer, Jonathan Edwards. The world in which Franklin moved lay beneath a clear, white light, without shadow of concealment, with nothing to cloud the sincerity and keenness of his vision; but far beyond, in the dim penumbra, loomed that other world of his contemporary—a region into whose treacherous obscurities those must venture who seek the comforts and sweet

ecstasies of faith, and who find these at times, and at times, also, drink in only strange exhalations of deceit and vapours of spiritual pride. As often as Franklin's path approached that misty shore he drew back as from a bottomless pit. Like other men of his century, he had built up for himself his own private religion, from which the vague inherited emotions of the past were to be utterly excluded. The little book that contains his formulated creed and liturgy may still be read, an extraordinary document in the history of deism. The remarkable point in it is the frankly pagan way in which he relegates the Infinite God to realms beyond our concern, and selects for worship "that particular wise and good God who is the author and owner of our system." Even more remarkable is the "*great and extensive project*," divulged in the Autobiography, of creating throughout the world a kind of religious Freemasonry, to be initiated into his own doctrines and to be called *The Society of the Free and Easy*—"free, as being, by the general practice and habit of the virtues, free from the dominion of vice; and particularly by the practice of industry and frugality, free from debt, which exposes a man to confinement, and a species of slavery to his creditors." Who can read this without recalling Lamb's panegyric of the *great race* of borrowers and fearing that he has "fallen into the society of *lenders* and *little men*"?

The same practical views of religion may be

traced through many of Franklin's familiar letters. Sometimes they combine with his humour to form a kind of benevolent worldly wisdom, as in this letter to his sister Jane, with its mock exegesis of some religious verses written long ago by an uncle:

In a little book he sent her, called "None but Christ," he wrote an acrostic on her name, which for namesake's sake, as well as the good advice it contains, I transcribe and send you, viz.

"Illuminated from on high,
And shining brightly in your sphere,
Ne'er faint, but keep a steady eye,
Expecting endless pleasures there.

"Flee vice as you 'd a serpent flee;
Raise *faith* and *hope* three stories higher,
And let Christ's endless love to thee
Ne'er cease to make thy love aspire.
Kindness of heart by words express,
Let your obedience be sincere,
In prayer and praise your God address,
Nor cease, till he can cease to hear."

. . . You are to understand, then, that *faith*, *hope*, and *charity* have been called the three steps of Jacob's ladder, reaching from earth to heaven; our author calls them *stories*, likening religion to a building, and these are the three stories of the Christian edifice. Thus improvement in religion is called *building up* and *edification*. *Faith* is then the ground floor, *hope* is up one pair of stairs. My dear beloved Jenny, don't delight so much to dwell in those lower rooms, but get as fast as you can into the garret, for in truth the best room in the house is *charity*. For my part, I wish the house was turned upside down;

't is so difficult (when one is fat) to go up stairs; and not only so, but I imagine *hope* and *faith* may be more firmly built upon *charity*, than *charity* upon *faith* and *hope*. However that may be, I think it the better reading to say—

"Raise faith and hope one story higher."

Correct it boldly, and I 'll support the alteration; for, when you are up two stories already, if you raise your building three stories higher you will make five in all, which is two more than there should be, you expose your upper rooms more to the winds and storms; and, besides, I am afraid the foundation will hardly bear them, unless indeed you build with such light stuff as straw and stubble, and that, you know, won't stand fire.

In the end one feels that both in Franklin's strength and his limitations, in the versatility and efficiency of his intellect as in the lack of the deeper qualities of the imagination, he was the typical American. If his victorious common sense excluded that thin vein of mysticism which is one of the paradoxes of our national character, he represents the powers that have prevailed and are still shaping us to what end we do not see. In particular one cannot read far in his letters without noting the predominance of that essentially American trait—contemporaneity. One gets the impression that here was almost, if not quite, the most alert and most capacious intellect that ever concerned itself entirely with the present. He was, of course, an exemplar of prudence, and thus in a way had his eye on the immediate future; but it was the demands of the

present that really interested him, and the possession of the past, the long backward of time, was to him a mere oblivion.

Parton regarded Franklin as the model Christian, others find no religion in him at all. Their views depend on how they are affected by his absorption in the present, by his relegation of Faith and Hope to the attic and his choice of earth-born Charity. There is, in fact, no more extraordinary chapter in the religious history of the eighteenth century than the episode of the Autobiography which tells how Franklin deliberately set aside all the traditions and experience of the past and set himself to create a brand-new worship of his own, adapted to the needs of the hour. Was this prophetic of our cheerful readiness, long ago observed by Renan, to start a new religion among us every time a man is convicted of sin? Are Christian Science and all the lesser brood merely in the line of Franklin's projected brotherhood of "The Free and Easy"? Some of the more modern sects seem at least to have taken to themselves that society's virtue of "industry," and have made themselves "free of debt."

And it was this overmastering sense of the present that coloured Franklin's schemes of education. Everything should be practical, and look to immediate results. Naturally the Classics, as the very embodiment of the past, received scant sympathy from him. He merely tolerated them

in the project which led to the Philadelphia Academy and the University of Pennsylvania, and one of his last pamphlets, written, indeed, from his death-bed, was a diatribe against Greek and Latin.

As a writer he has all the clearness, force, and flexibility that come from attention to what is near at hand; he lacks also that depth of background which we call imagination, and which is largely the indwelling of the past in the present. A clear, steady light rests upon his works; no obscuring shadow stretches out over them from remote days, and also no shade inviting to repose. It is not by accident that his two most literary productions, in the stricter sense of that word, are the Autobiography, which might be called a long lesson in the method of settling problems of immediate necessity, and the Introductions to the Almanacs—those documents in contemporaneity that have so strangely weathered the years. Particularly the Introduction of 1757, known as the *Harangue of Father Abraham*, has been translated into all the languages of the world, and has almost made of Poor Richard a figure of popular mythology:

> I found the good man had thoroughly studied my almanacs and digested all I had dropped on these topics during the course of five and twenty years. The frequent mention he made of me must have tired any one else; but my vanity was wonderfully delighted with it, though I was conscious that not a tenth part of the wisdom was my

own, which he ascribed to me, but rather the gleanings that I had made of the sense of all ages and nations.

And the sense of all ages is pretty well summed up by Poor Richard in "One to-day is worth two to-morrows."

CHARLES LAMB AGAIN

I HAVE already said something in these essays about Lamb as a writer and man, but the occasion of two excellent biographies,[1] in French and English, is too tempting to let pass without a word of more particular appreciation.

In the matter of literary criticism the honour must remain, as might be expected, with the Frenchman. M. Derocquigny has indeed treated this aspect of his theme with an amplitude and a precision which no English writer has approached, and he has also shown the trained subtlety of his race in winding into the secrets of Lamb's personality. In these things Mr. Lucas is not strong; more especially his critical pages—they are few in number—would seem to suffer from a tacit acceptance of Lamb as a great writer. Charming Lamb's work certainly was, fascinating in a way, and above all, like himself, lovable; but I cannot help feeling that the jealous pother of so many editors recently engaged on the same subject has tended to throw dust in our eyes.

[1] *Charles Lamb, sa vie et ses œuvres.* Par Jules Derocquigny. Lille: Le Bigot Frères, 1904.

The Life of Charles Lamb. By E. V. Lucas. 2 vols. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905.

Let us, if possible, hold fast to distinctions. To deal with his work as if it formed a body of literature great in any proper sense of the word is to place him among the small company of masterful spirits where his genius would only appear more tenuous by comparison, and it is to miss, I think, the truer source of enjoyment.

Certainly, if we would extract the sweetness from Lamb's slender book of verse we must come to it with no such expectations as we should bring to the great poets. Lamb, in fact, writes as one who has "been enamour'd of rare poesy" rather than as one impelled himself to sing. Now and then—once at least in the dialogue between Margaret and Simon Woodvil—he echoes nobly the larger utterance of the Elizabethans:

> To see the sun to bed, and to arise,
> Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,
> Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him,
> With all his fires and travelling glories round him.
> Sometimes the moon on soft night clouds to rest,
> Like beauty nestling in a young man's breast,
> And all the winking stars, her handmaids, keep
> Admiring silence, while these lovers sleep.
> *Sometimes owtstretcht, in very idleness,*
> *Nought doing, saying little, thinking less,*
> *To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,*
> *Go eddying round; and small birds, how they fare,*
> When mother Autumn fills their beaks with corn,
> Filch'd from the careless Amalthea's horn.

No doubt there is occasionally, as in the four

lines here underscored, a tone which may be called the veritable *lingua toscana in bocca romana*, the speech of Elizabeth with some added sympathetic accent of our own times. We know that Godwin, chancing upon this passage, hunted for it in Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and then sent to Lamb to help him to the author. But for the most part Lamb's verse reflects only the half-faded light of old-world fancies flickering on the details of a prosaic modern life,—album rhymes with the faint aroma of Quarles upon them, and Cockney sonnets that remind you of Drummond—or Bowles. The mood of the book is like the comfort and dreams of firelight after an irksome day, and as such it has a well-defined charm; but it opens no door into the higher region of the imagination. "A page of his writings," as Hazlitt observes, "recalls to our fancy the *stranger* on the grate, fluttering in its dusky tenuity, with its idle superstition and hospitable welcome."

Perhaps even the most enthusiastic admirers of Lamb would not claim more than this for his verse; the real confusion begins when we consider him as a critic. One capital service—not without the detriment of false emphasis—he did indeed perform, by reviving an interest in the old English dramatists and in some of the half-forgotten writers of the seventeenth century; and to a certain extent he acted as a friendly censor of the extravagances of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

So, for example, he admired *Peter Bell*, but his humour could not fail to seize on the more abject lines of that poem. The story goes that once on seeing from the street a solemn evening gathering he shook the railings and shouted at the window :

> Is it a party in a parlour,
> All silent and all damned ?

Whether in part from Lamb's criticism or not, these lines were deleted from *Peter Bell* after the first editions of 1819.[1] It is one of the irremediable losses of literature that we do not know his thoughts on the gem of that composition :

> Only the Ass, with motion dull,
> Upon the pivot of his skull
> Turns round his long left ear.

The point to observe is that Lamb was not so much a great critic as a reader of fine taste. "His taste," said Coleridge "acts so as to appear like the mechanic simplicity of an instinct—in brief, he is worth an hundred men of mere talents. Conversation with the latter tribe is like the use of leaden bells—one warms by exercise; Lamb

[1] The full stanza reads :

> "Is it a party in a parlour?
> Cramm'd just as they on earth were cramm'd—
> Some sipping punch, some sipping tea,
> But, as you by their faces see,
> All silent and all damn'd."

June 2, 1820, Wordsworth was talking about these poems with Lamb and Crabb Robinson. June 11, Robinson records that he had begged Wordsworth to omit the stanza.

every now and then *irradiates*, and the beam, though fine and single as a hair, is yet rich with colours." It was this instinct, guided in part by a common tendency of the age, that led him to fasten on the Elizabethans. His remarks on them do often *irradiate*—the word is aptly chosen —but as a whole his writing is too lacking in systematic reflection to rank him high among critics. There is no sense of tracking the human spirit down all its wandering way of self-revelation, nor is there any effort to measure and balance the full meaning of the individual writer. He "never," as he himself confessed to Southey, "judged system-wise of things, but fastened upon particulars." If this habit saved him from rigidity and from deciduous theories, it also brought about a misleading incompleteness. No one could gather the just proportions of the Elizabethan era from his sporadic remarks, nor, to take a single case, could one gain any notion of Andrew Marvell's works as a whole from Lamb's occasional and irrational eulogies. In his own day his "imperfect sympathies" made him blind to the higher qualities of half the world. He was in close touch with what may be called the bourgeois group about him, but to all the aristocratic school, headed by Byron and Shelley and Scott, he was not merely unsympathetic, but actually hostile. One feels even that he was bound to Coleridge and Wordsworth, the outstanding leaders of his own group, more by per-

sonal than by intellectual ties. Such an admission can almost be read in the banter of his letters:

> Coleridge is absent but 4 miles, and the neighbourhood of such a man is as exciting as the presence of 50 ordinary Persons. 'T is enough to be within the whiff and wind of his genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet. If I lived with him or the *author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, and be dragged along in the current of other peoples' thoughts, hampered in a net.

In the same letter occurs the famous phrase applied to Coleridge: "His face when he repeats his verses hath its ancient glory, *an Archangel a little damaged*." This indeed is something different from Lamb's uncritical disregard of the whole aristocratic school, and shows a sensitiveness to the weaker side of one of his personal idols. But he never developed these intuitions, never cut into that flabby mass with the sundering sword, as Hazlitt did so ruthlessly in the *Examiner* letter, which was built up on the same phrase, "Less than arch-angel ruined," and which so fluttered the literary dovecote.

And in public Lamb was careful that not even such a hint of his sharper sentiments should escape him. There is, in fact, just a touch of mutual admiration in the writings of the whole circle, so that we can understand, though we may heartily condemn, the coarse assault of the *Monthly Review* upon them as "a little coterie of half-bred men, who . . . puffed off each other as the first writers of the day." Hazlitt belonged

to the coterie as much as he could belong to anything outside himself, but Hazlitt, though warped at times by prejudice, had the true critical passion, amounting almost to a fury, one might say, to get at the heart of things and strip the good from the bad. Neither the temper nor the genius of Lamb would have enabled him to detest a man's principles yet love his literary work as Hazlitt did with Scott, or to pass from ridicule of Wordsworth's egotism and dulness to so splendid a panegyric of his nobler parts.

If we wish for a parallel to Lamb's method as a critic we must come down to Edward FitzGerald, though by education and taste the two were so far apart. There are—who would gainsay it?—glimpses of rare discernment in Lamb's letters and notes, flights of sustained fancy in his critical essays, phrases and metaphors that are like windows opening on the garden of intellectual delight; but after all, it is the contagion of Lamb's own love for his favourites that makes us think of him as a critic. His appeal is not to the judgment, but to personal friendship. For one who remembers his comment on the catastrophe of *The Broken Heart* (Hazlitt, by the way, balks at everything that Lamb here lauds), or has comprehended his subtle paradox on the Restoration Comedy, there are ten who will recall his letter to Coleridge: "If you find the Miltons in certain parts dirtied and soiled with a crumb of right Gloucester, blacked in the candle (my usual sup-

per), or, peradventure, a stray ash of tobacco wafted into the crevices, look to that passage more especially: depend upon it, it contains good matter." So many critics seem to turn books into business, so often we doubt whether the great books that are commended are really enjoyed! Lamb we know read for pleasure, as did the wise FitzGerald, and he read Milton.[1] Perhaps we get even closer to the secret of Lamb's influence in a whimsical letter to Barton, written when his head was "stuffed up with the East winds":

> I chuse a very little bit of paper, for my ear hisses when I bend down to write. I can hardly read a book, for I miss that *small soft voice* which the idea of articulated words raises (almost imperceptibly to you) in a silent reader. *I seem too deaf to see what I read.*

We can imagine FitzGerald listening to that

[1] It is merely an interesting coincidence that Lamb and FitzGerald should have used almost the same words in regard to the Additions to *The Spanish Tragedy*. In his *Specimens* Lamb says of them: "There is nothing in the undoubted plays of Jonson which would authorise us to suppose that he could have supplied the scenes in question. I should suspect the agency of some 'more potent spirit'. Webster might have furnished them. They are full of that wild solemn preternatural cast of grief which bewilders us in the *Duchess of Malfy*." FitzGerald writes in a similar strain to Fanny Kemble: "Nobody knows who wrote this one scene [III., xii., A.]; it was thought Ben Jonson, who could no more have written it than I who read it: for what else of his is it like? Whereas, Webster one fancies might have done it."

small soft voice of the printed page as he turned his Madame de Sévigné or his Cervantes, and the warmth of this living intimacy between author and reader is communicated to us of more sluggish temperament.

And a curious similarity might be discovered between Lamb and FitzGerald in their disregard for the actual concrete book. It was Lamb who sent his volumes to a "wizened old cobbler hard by" to be patched and botched up; and who would not suppose these were a young lad's recollections of FitzGerald at Woodbridge rather than of Lamb at Enfield?—

> There were few modern volumes in his collection; and subsequently, such presentation copies as he received were wont to find their way into my own book-case, and often through eccentric channels. A Leigh Hunt, for instance, would come skimming to my feet through the branches of the apple-trees (our gardens were contiguous); or a Bernard Barton would be rolled downstairs after me, from the library door. *Marcian Colonna* I remember finding on my window-sill, damp with the night's fog; and the *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* I picked out of the strawberry-bed. It was not that Lamb was indifferent to the literary doings of his friends; but their books, as books, were unharmonious on his shelves. They clashed, both in outer and inner entity, with the Marlowes and Miltons that were his household gods.

It is not as a poet or constructive critic that Lamb lives to-day, but as the Elia of the Essays and the quaint humourist of the Letters. These are indeed classics in the best sense of the word,

being actually read and loved. Yet even here we should not allow our gratitude to blind us to the reality, nor permit our sense of charm to express itself in terms of greatness; for by just such indiscriminations as this we gradually blunt the finer edge of the mind. I am not going to dwell again on the peculiar evasion of truth that runs through all Lamb's essays, separating them, so at least it seems to me, from the writings that belong to the great tradition. I have already in an earlier essay touched, perhaps over-heavily, on this aspect of his work, and I would not by repetition unduly heighten the emphasis. No such charge, however, can be laid if I quote a few words from M. Derocquigny on the same subject:

> One may love Lamb without admiring indiscriminately everything in his character. And still one can scarcely wish that he were exempt from his weaknesses. These are an essential factor in his genius, and without them Lamb would have been something not himself. They breathed into him the spirit of indulgence and pity which too often desert the heart of the strong man. And we know that by much self-control we are left ignorant of many sides of our fallible nature. The great connoisseurs of the human heart have generally had great weaknesses.
>
> It is fortunate that he was not a writer by profession His merit is just this: that he was an irregular, an amateur of literature—a common character of old, which, to our regret, is gradually become more and more rare, and which Sainte-Beuve praises in speaking of Joubert, with whom, by the way, Lamb has more than one affinity.

His devotees exalt his wisdom, his profound thought, his penetrating criticism of life, his great knowledge of the human heart.

His wisdom is that of a contemplative man for whom the true life is a dream, and who avoids as far as possible the contact of realities. And it is useless to look to him for the conduct of life. His thought, turned in this direction by great misfortunes and confirmed in this habit by the reading which he sought for consolation, glides over these deeper questions with a humour half-playful and half-solemn, skims their surface, but into their depths never sinks.

This is not quite the tone of the English panegyrists of Lamb, nor will you find anything in Mr. Lucas's two large volumes that shows this kind of critical penetration.. He is weak where the French writer is strongest, and yet for another reason the English biography, perhaps, takes you nearer than the other to the secret of Lamb's spell. From a study of contemporary literature Mr. Lucas has made his work not so much a life of Lamb alone as a series of chapters on the characters, great and small, who composed Lamb's circle. There is no better criterion of a book than the other books it sends you immediately to read, and after laying down this biography I turned almost instinctively to Cicero's *De Amicitia* and to Montaigne's *De l'Amitié*, and, reading these, I began to understand how much of the magical appeal of Lamb's writings is due to the quintessence of friendship he has distilled into them. It is not the brave mingling of souls in the pursuit

of virtue which the philosophers vaunt, nor could it be likened to that *omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate summa consensio*, to use the rolling eloquence of Cicero. I fear the bond of union was rather one of those "incommodities of mortality," which a later Roman deplored, but which Lamb turned to such sweet advantage: *Nec tantum necessitas errandi sed errorum amor.* And it had little of that "inexplicable and fatal force" that drove Montaigne and La Boétie to seek, before they had seen, each other, and made of their two wills one at first sight. Something of these lofty modes coloured the early union of Lamb and Coleridge, but it only served to introduce a vein of mawkishness into his first letters, and luckily did not endure. Nor was this youthful ideal of friendship unconscious with him. In these days he was writing his tragedy of *John Woodvil*, which turns on that theme.

> I have been meditating this half-hour
> On all the properties of a brave friendship,
> The mysteries that are in it, the noble uses,
> Its limits withal, and its nice boundaries—

says the hero of the play, and decides that it is not enough for a man to die for a friend, but he must wantonly place himself in the friend's power by betraying to him a family secret.

There needed a baptism of tears—and gin—to bring Lamb to a kind of earthly regeneration. The tragedy of Mary's life and the disappoint-

ments of his own soon taught him the hollowness of his exaltations; the "ragged regiment" that lured him into London streets perfected the cure. "Twelve years ago," he afterwards wrote in one of his semi-confessional essays, "I had completed my six and twentieth year. I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I had reason to think, did not rust in me unused. About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken; yet seemed to have something noble about them. We dealt about the wit, or what passes for it after midnight, jovially. Of the quality called fancy I certainly possessed a larger share than my companions. Encouraged by their applause, I set up for a profest joker!"—Yes, I fear it was those contemners of the law, Fenwick and Fell (how their names smack of naughtiness!), that created for us the true Charles Lamb.

To Lamb himself there must have been a malicious joy in thinking that the acquaintance with Fenwick came through Godwin, who differed from that disreputable prowler in everything—even in his manner of taking gifts. Immortal Fenwick, whom we know as Ralph Bigod, Esq.,

setting forth in London streets, "like some Alexander, upon his great enterprise, 'borrowing and to borrow!'"—alas! his lofty spirit could not snatch him from the vulgar fate of mankind; he too passed away, save in Lamb's heroic epicedium:

> When I think of this man: his fiery glow of heart; his swell of feeling; how magnificent, how *ideal* he was; how great at the midnight hour; and when I compare with him the companions with whom I have associated since, I grudge the saving of a few idle ducats, and think that I am fallen into the society of *lenders*, and *little men*.

R. Fell, also, a man of humbler genius, we surmise, came to Lamb through Godwin; and Southey tells that once, when the Philosopher in his own room had dropped asleep before them, "they carried off his rum, brandy, sugar, picked his pockets of everything, and made off in triumph."

These, then, were the mystagogues who initiated Lamb back into humanity. "He found them," as he was to write of those days in reminiscence, "floating on the surface of society; and the colour, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him—but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalised (and offences were sure to arise), he could not help it."

One must allow, of course, for the note of mis-

chievous exaggeration in all these retrospective confessions, but a period of retirement at Newgate vouches for the character of Fell, and Lamb's own whilom elevation in the stocks shows that his amusements may at least have been rather tumultuous. He came out of these experiences the most immaculate of roués, let us say; the sweetest and most exemplary of sinners. Henceforth to the physical responsibilities of life he submits bravely, almost heroically, yet in his mind he "yearns after and covets what soothes the frailty of human nature." I like to think of his later associations, except for their beautiful fidelity, in those lines of Euripides:

> Full many things the days have taught:
> I know that mortal men should rest
> In moderate friendships, know how fraught
> With fear the raptures of the breast;
> Safer these unions of the mind,
> When light to loose and swift to bind. . . .
>
> The unyielding rules of life, they say,
> Bring more of peril than of pleasure,
> And on the body prey;
> So I commend the golden measure,
> The too-much put away.

Brave and learned men were among Lamb's friends, but in his chambers they met together to confute philosophy with a pun, and to pack wisdom into a jest. Good and sustained conversation there often was, but no rigour of logic (this was reserved for the game), and above all no crabbed politics. These Attic nights in the Inner

Temple or Mitre Court or Southampton Buildings, wherever Lamb's shifting tabernacle might be, were a kind of Shandean escape from the world, where fancy guided to a purer virtue than the harsh commands of conscience know.

We have received many accounts of his famous Wednesday evenings, and from these and from other writings we might piece together a kind of composite and half-fantastic picture, in defiance of time and place. There are two rooms for the reception of visitors, his summer and winter parlours as he calls them, in one of which he has hung up a choice collection of Hogarth's plates in narrow black frames, as if even here he must have the dear pathos and humour of the streets about him. In the other room he has nailed up a book-case, new now, but with more aptitudes for growing old than you shall often see; and this is well, for the books are ancient and worn, another "ragged regiment" from which he will never wean himself. The furniture is suitably old-fashioned and mellowed by use, and the low ceiling shows traces of the GREAT PLANT—

> Brother of Bacchus, later born,
> The old world was sure forlorn,
> Wanting thee, that aidest more
> The god's victories than before
> All his panthers, and the brawls
> Of his piping Bacchanals.

But Bacchus himself is not absent, if a vast jug of porter on a side table may be under the tutelage

of that god. And there are cold veal pie and smoking-hot potatoes, under the care of what deity I know not, laid out on the same board. As yet the guests are few, and the porter vanishes slowly; but later the jug will need many replenishings from the foaming pots which the best tap of Fleet Street supplies. Whist has already begun. At a table Lamb sits opposite Martin Burney, nephew of the great Madame D'Arblay—strange, blundering, obstinate, grotesque-looking, innocent Martin, like a second Goldsmith, "on the top scale of my friendship ladder," (says Lamb of him once,) "on which an angel or two is still climbing." To the right of Lamb you may see Godwin, his face retaining its aspect of wooden gravity; but trust it not, for his mind is intently on the game, and he is watching the play of his partner—Mrs. Battle, shall we call her?—who is sitting bolt upright, with a lingering scowl on her brow from some unwarrantable levity of the host. Is it possible that Lamb has just ventured his immortal rebuke to Martin: "If dirt was trumps what a hand you'd hold"?

But the hour grows late and other guests are gathering,—Captain Burney, Martin's father, who has sailed over the world with Captain Cook and has made a pun in the Otaheite language, "a better recommendation as a companion than all his honours of exploration or of war"; Jem White, the author of the *Falstaff Letters*, in which some of Lamb's own wit lies buried, more famous for

his annual feast of chimney-sweepers ; George Dyer, most absent-minded and incorrigible of book-worms, a kind of unanointed Coleridge. Dyer, said Hazlitt, "hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or like the dust on the outside of knowledge, which should not too rudely be brushed aside." And it was this same celestial bungler who walked out of Lamb's house at Islington in broad day straight into a stream of water, furnishing thereby a modern instance of Plato's philosopher who falls into a well while looking at the sky, and affording Elia the subject of one of his most humorous essays. "For with G. D—— to be absent from the body is sometimes (not to speak profanely) to be present with the Lord. At the very time when, personally encountering thee, he passes on with no recognition—or, being stopped, starts like a thing surprised—at that moment, reader, he is on Mount Tabor—or Parnassus—or co-sphered with Plato." And Hazlitt strides awkwardly in, with his coarse hair thrown back and his eyes ablaze. He is a silent man often, looking with surly suspicion upon all about him; but at times, as now, that self-devouring soul of his breaks out in a savage, overwhelming eloquence. "I get no conversation in London that is absolutely worth attending to but his," says Lamb, who alone of all refuses to quarrel with him. To-night he is brimming with indignation against Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*. You can hear him beating out his rage in the

next room: "This hired assassin of the Government," he exclaims, "has grown old in the service of corruption. He drivels on to the last with prostituted impotence and shameless effrontery; salves a meagre reputation for wit, by venting the driblets of his spleen and impertinence on others; answers their arguments by confuting himself; mistakes habitual obtuseness of intellect for a particular acuteness, not to be imposed upon by shallow appearances; unprincipled rancor for zealous loyalty; and the irritable, discontented, vindictive, peevish effusions of bodily pain and mental imbecility for proofs of refinement of taste and strength of understanding." The tirade promises to go on endlessly, swelling with fury against the universal corruption of taste, when Lamb, who has left his party at the whist table, breaks in with a stuttering echo: "Damn the age! I will write for antiquity"; and the tension is dissolved in laughter. Even pale, earnest Charles Lloyd, who is discoursing with Leigh Hunt in a corner over "fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute," forgets his melancholy argument and joins the larger group.

As the circle gathers about their host you will observe how slight and short he is in comparison with their bulkier forms,—"a light frame," wrote one of them afterwards, "so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it." Perhaps the clerkly black of his dress, and the wearing of small-clothes and stockings which other men are

discarding for pantaloons, exaggerate his slender appearance. But his head and face are nobly formed, of a Jewish cast, you may say, with dark hair crisping about the forehead, and soft brown eyes, the two not quite of the same colour if you look closely, and delicately carved nose. Who shall describe the meaning and expression of his countenance, as he glances from one friend to another? Who shall catch its quivering sweetness, and fix it forever in words?—the deep thought striving with humour, the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth, the dignity and gravity of his brow. There is a diversion as the solid, plump, governmental figure of John Rickman is seen at the door, Rickman who lives in the same Buildings, immediately opposite, and who has a pleasant habit of dropping in at a late hour when the crust of the evening is broken. "A fine rattling fellow," whispers Lamb as he approaches the group, "who has gone through life laughing at solemn apes; himself hugely literate oppressively full of information in all stuff of conversation, from matter-of-fact to Xenophon and Plato, and can talk Greek with Porson, politics with Thelwall, conjecture with George Dyer here, nonsense with me, and anything with anybody." Greetings and a jest or two pass, and then Lamb, with a side glance at Dyer, breaks into solemn matter. "Ah, Rickman," says he, "here 's Manning writing from his antipodal home in Canton, and wants your help in a

matter of exquisite learning, viz., whether Ho-hing-tong shall be spelt with an *o* or an *a*." While Rickman is collecting his wits to retort, Lamb has shuffled away to his desk and has taken out a sheet of paper half written over in the neat hand he has learned at the India House. It is the celebrated Christmas letter to Manning not yet sent on its voyage across the seas, and he begins to read, stammering a little at first (if indeed I might hear that voice and see that group !):

In sober sense what makes you so long from among us, Manning ? You must not expect to see the same England again which you left. . . . Your friends have all got old—those you left blooming ; myself, (who am one of the few that remember you,) those golden hairs which you recollect my taking a pride in, turned to silvery and grey. Mary has been dead and buried many years : she desired to be buried in the silk gown you sent her. [She is wearing it this evening, as we see!] Rickman, that you remember active and strong, now walks out supported by a servant maid and a stick. Martin Burney is a very old man. . . . Poor Godwin! I was passing his tomb the other day in Cripplegate churchyard. There are some verses upon it written by Miss ———, which if I thought good enough I would send you. He was one of those who would have hailed your return, not with boisterous shouts and clamours, but with the complacent gratulations of a philosopher anxious to promote knowledge as leading to happiness; but his systems and his theories are ten feet deep in Cripplegate mould. Coleridge is just dead, having lived just long enough to close the eyes of Wordsworth, who paid the debt to Nature but a week or two before. Poor Col., but two days before he

died he wrote to a bookseller, proposing an epic poem on the *Wanderings of Cain*, in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises in criticism, metaphysics, and divinity, but few of them in a state of completion. They are now destined, perhaps, to wrap up spices. You see what mutations the busy hand of Time has produced.

So the drollery runs. And now the mystic hour arrives ; the punch is mixed and hot water is brought in for the brandy. The talk grows in volume, and the quick jest rattles merrily above the wild paradox and the sober criticism. Lamb, with a wistful look at his sister, has lighted another pipe, his fifth, and she, knowing the consequence, lays a warning hand on his shoulder. "Nay," he ejaculates, " let me alone ; I would wish that my last breath might be through a pipe and exhaled in a pun."

But even the banquets of the gods must end. One after another of the guests has shot his parting arrow and passed out into the night. And at last the few who are left draw about the dying fire, letting their talk drift to those solemn intimate things that haunt the mind in such moments of relaxation. Death is named, and the irony of life and the recompense of the grave, and Lamb, with a slight shudder, takes up the word: "Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light,

and fireside conversations, and innocent vanities, and jest, and *irony itself* —do these things go out with life? Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides, when you are pleasant with him? And you, my midnight darlings, my folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embraces? Must knowledge come to me, if it come at all, by some awkward experiment of intuition, and no longer by the familiar process of reading? Shall I enjoy friendships there, wanting the smiling indications which point me to them here—the recognisable face—the 'sweet assurance of a look——?' "

He has risen now, and breaks off with a gesture and a smile of winsome pathos; and the little band silently separates. Not often does their host so unlock the treasures of his heart.

More than criticism, I think, we need the impression of such scenes as this on our mind; we need to know how Lamb lived with these friends, and how in their society and in the scarcely less human companionship of books he made for himself a refuge, an evasion, if you will, from the realities of life. For we do not go to his Essays and Letters primarily for transcendence of intellect or creative genius, but for this spirit of illusory friendliness that runs through them all, lending to our mortal cloak of frailties and humilities a beauty that is almost a beatitude. The material for this knowledge Mr. Lucas has

given us in generous abundance, and, so doing, has brought Lamb a little nearer to us than he was before.

WALT WHITMAN

It is ill dealing with the prophets. They themselves may be approachable, serene, and simple, but about them their disciples soon cast such a mirage of words that the seeker is blinded and baffled, if he is not utterly repelled. And denying what the disciples say, one fears the rebuke of denying the great principles whose names they usurp. You may read in Mr. Burroughs or Mr. O'Connor or Dr. Bucke and feel so strong a repulsion for their idol that only a copious draught direct from the *Leaves of Grass* or the *Specimen Days* will restore your mind to equilibrium. Yet it is fair now to add that, by eliminating himself and allowing Whitman to speak his own words, Mr. Horace Traubel, certainly one of the least tolerable of these enthusiasts, has given us a book of some importance,[1] a daily record of intercourse during four months with his master, when old and paralytic and waiting for the outward tide.

Here we may meet the "good grey poet" just

[1] *With Walt Whitman in Camden.* (March 28–July 14, 1888.) By Horace Traubel. Boston: Small, Maynard, & Co., 1906.

as he was in his little house in Mickle Street, Camden; may sit with him in his chamber in the midst of its indescribable confusion, and hear him talk, "garrulous to the very last." "There is all sorts of débris scattered about," says the diary, "bits of manuscript, letters, newspapers, books. Near by his elbow towards the window a wash-basket filled with such stuff. Lady Mount Temple's waistcoat [a gift to Whitman from England] was thrown carelessly on the motley table—a Blake volume was used by him for a footstool: near by a copy of De Kay's poems given by Gilder to Rhys. Various other books. A Dickens under his elbow on the chair. He pushed the books here and there several times this evening in his hunt for particular papers. 'This,' he said once, 'is not so much a mess as it looks: you notice that I find most of the things I look for and without much trouble.'" As a matter of fact, his usual method of hunting was to rummage with his stick among the papers on the floor until the desired object came to the surface. Meanwhile, what other chance treasures floated up!—letters from Tennyson, Symonds, Roden Noel, Lord Houghton, Dowden, and many another stout admirer across the sea, all which were passed over to Mr. Traubel and by him duly transcribed for our perusal. What will surprise most readers of the diary is the predominance of this bookish talk; and, except where his own work is concerned, Whitman shows himself a trenchant and just

critic—as might be inferred from his essays on Carlyle and Burns. One could wish that he did not so often fall into the trick common among the ill-educated of denouncing criticism while themselves exercising that function. It was, for example, not gracious to complain of Mr. Stedman for weighing him in the critical balance, when he himself was subjecting writer after writer to the same process. And again, in a larger sense, though we may after a fashion understand his distinction, there is almost a touch of insincerity in the constant segregation of himself from literature and the literary class. After all, a book 's a book however much there 's in 't, and the whole ambition of Whitman's life was in his authorship. More than that, we remember how many times in the *Leaves of Grass* he declares that the justification of America shall be her poets; and what student of the closet would have dared, as he did in his lecture on the *Death of Abraham Lincoln*, to reduce the whole desperate terror of the war to the needs of the literary imagination?—

> I say, certain secondary and indirect results, out of the tragedy of this death, are, in my opinion, greatest. Not the event of the murder itself. Not that Mr. Lincoln strings the principal points and personages of the period, like beads, upon the single thread of his career. Not that his idiosyncrasy, in its sudden appearance and disappearance, stamps this republic with a stamp more mark'd and enduring than any yet given by any one man —(more even than Washington's;)—but, join'd with these, the immeasurable value and meaning of that whole

tragedy lies, to me, in senses finally dearest to a nation, (and here all our own)—*the imaginative and artistic senses—the literary and dramatic ones.* Not in any common or low meaning of those terms, but a meaning precious to the race, and to every age. A long and varied series of contradictory events arrives at last at its highest poetic, single, central, pictorial dénouement. The whole involved, baffling, multiform whirl of the secession period comes to a head, and is gather'd in one brief flash of lightning-illumination—one simple, fierce deed. Its sharp culmination, and as it were solution, of so many bloody and angry problems, illustrates those climax-moments on the stage of universal Time, where the historic Muse at one entrance, and the tragic Muse at the other, suddenly ringing down the curtain, close an immense act in the long drama of creative thought, and give it radiation, tableau, stranger than fiction. Fit radiation—fit close! *How the imagination—how the student loves these things!*

I am not sure but a complete critique of Whitman's own methods as a poet, with his wanton neglect of those "climax-moments," might be read in such a passage as this. Certainly, a recollection of this more consciously artistic side of the man should be carried with us when we enter the little Mickle Street house with Mr. Traubel. There we shall see a wearied invalid, lounging nonchalantly and speaking the patois of the pavement, yet withal, if our ears are prepared, still the poet and seer. Other poets have narrowed and grown dogmatic with age, but to Whitman we feel that time has brought only sweetness and breadth; and this perhaps, despite the triviality

of much of the record and its childlike egotism, despite the fact that the deeper meanings of Whitman's mind were quite dark to the disciple, is the last impression of Mr. Traubel's book. One pictures the old man as looking like the bust by Sidney Morse, which Whitman seems to have regarded as the best portrait of himself, and which resembles curiously the so-called head of Homer—

> with the broad suspense
> Of *lifted* brows, and lips intense
> Of garrulous god-innocence.

And one observes a little trait often mentioned by the disciple:—when the conversation takes a more solemn tone, the master breaks off and turns his eyes to the window, gazing into what vista of thought, who shall say? It is a pretty symbol of that "withdrawnness" of spirit, to use his own word, which those nearest to him never understood. Almost the only signs of petulance during these days of suffering came when his more fanatical friends tried to imprison him within the circle of their reforming dogmas. He would remain fluid to the end.

From this closing scene we may travel back over the earlier years in the first adequate biography of Whitman[1] yet published. Mr.

[1] *A Life of Walt Whitman.* By Henry Bryan Binns. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1905.—Since the writing of this essay Mr. Bliss Perry's sober and succinct biography has appeared. Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1906.

Binns, a worshipping young Englishman who still retains some leaven of common sense, has skilfully thrown into relief the capital moments of Whitman's career, particularly that obscure period when he was formulating his new art. We see Whitman, first as a writer of meagre talent, promising to develop into a lesser Poe or Hawthorne ; then a time of silence, and suddenly, in the year 1855, in the exact *mezzo cammin* of his life, he prints the first issue of that extraordinary book, the *Leaves of Grass*, with its dithyrambic annunciation of the wedding of Romantic individualism with sentimental democracy:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

What happened during those years of gestation ? From himself we know only that one February day in 1848 he received an invitation to go to New Orleans and edit the *Crescent ;* that he set off with his brother Jeff, and proceeded leisurely through the Middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers; that he lived in New Orleans for some months, and then plodded back northward, up the Mississippi and the Missouri, by the Great Lakes, and down the Hudson to Brooklyn once more, where for a while he

worked again as printer and as builder, but intermittently and with his heart elsewhere. We know that during these seven or eight years he was writing and rewriting, casting about for a form proper to his ideas, and that he "had great trouble in leaving out the stock 'poetical' touches." But of the deeper motives at work we hear from himself nothing. Mr. Binns finds in the enlargement of Whitman's mental horizon by travel one of the main causes of his poetical conversion, and with this he connects that shadowy passion which somewhere lies in the background of the poet's experience, alluded to more than once, but never fully revealed. It seems that about this time Whitman formed an intimate relationship with a Southern lady of higher social rank than his own, who became the mother of his child, perhaps, in after years, of his children; and that he was prevented by family prejudice or some other obstacle from marriage or the acknowledgment of his paternity. One would like to connect this incident with the fair portrait over his mantel in Mickle Street—"an old sweetheart of mine," as he once said in the presence of Mr. Traubel, "a sweetheart, many, many, years ago." But when asked whether she was still living, he seemed profoundly stirred, and lapsed into his usual reticence. "He closed his eyes, shook his head: 'I 'd rather not say anything more about that just now.'" All this is involved in conjecture, yet such an experience would help to explain the

emotional intensifying of his self-consciousness which joins with the broadening of his national-consciousness to inspire the *Leaves of Grass*.

We may be thankful for these hints from Mr. Binns and Mr. Traubel, but the best commentary on Whitman, apart from this period of gestation, is still his own *Specimen Days*, one of the most remarkable autobiographies ever written, despite a certain tediousness due to its paucity, not poverty, of ideas, and its ejaculatory language. The external elements that moulded his character are here set forth with extreme precision—first of all the sturdy English and Dutch stock, thoroughly Americanised, from which he sprung, and then the old homestead in the garden spot of Long Island. Not far off lay the Great South Bay, and beyond that the sandy bars and the ever-beating Atlantic. All the sights and sounds of the sea entered into the child's heart and spoke in the songs of the man. As a boy, he longed to write a book which should express "this liquid, mystic theme," and in old age his nights were haunted with a vision "of interminable white-brown sand, hard and smooth and broad, with the ocean perpetually, grandly, rolling in upon it, with slow-measured sweep, with rustle and hiss and foam, and many a thump of low bass drums." Of all his poems, the most personal, perhaps the only one filled with passion as the world understands passion, is that incomparable rhapsody, *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, which tells how

once, in the month of lilacs, he listened by the beach to a mocking-bird complaining of its lost mate, and in the cry of the bird and the lisp of the waves heard the two riddling words of fate:

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
Down almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.

He call'd on his mate,
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know.

Yes my brother I know,
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their sorts,
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,
Listen'd long and long.

Soothe! Soothe! Soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.

Low hangs the moon, it rose late,
It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O madly the sea pushes upon the land,
With love, with love.

O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?

What is that little black thing I see there in the white?
Loud! loud! loud!
Loud I call to you my love!

. . . . . .

A word then (for I will conquer it),
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.

Of formal education Whitman had little, but he was always a miscellaneous reader of books, and he had that peculiar training of the American in those years which came from a variety of occupations. Through the *Specimen Days* we catch glimpses of him working desultorily as type-setter, proof-reader, editor, writer, school-teacher, carpenter—for the most part in Brooklyn, but seeing a good deal of the country, and making himself familiar with all the manifold life of his beloved Manhatta. It was always the tides of

life that attracted him. He had, as he says, a passion for ferries, and spent much of his time on these boats, often in the pilot-houses, where he could get a full sweep of the changing panorama. And the moving stream of Broadway attracted him with a like sympathy; he loved to lose himself in "the hurrying and vast amplitude of those never-ending human currents," or to gaze down into it from the advantage of the omnibus top.

The great event in his life was the war. His brother George had enlisted in the army, and in the battle of Fredericksburg was wounded. Walt immediately went South, found his brother not seriously injured, stayed with the army awhile, and then in Washington made himself a kind of voluntary nurse and friend in the hospital wards. He passed from cot to cot bearing what gifts he could bring, writing letters for the feeble, above all giving of himself out of the bountifulness of his superb physical nature:

> Behold I do not give lectures or a little charity,
> When I give I give myself.

Many a friendless, broken lad was actually raised by his magnetic sympathy out of the despair that meant death; many another found, in his serene countenance, courage for the inevitable end. "Poor youth," he jots down in his notebook of these days, "so handsome, athletic, with profuse beautiful shining hair. One time as I sat looking at him while he lay asleep, he suddenly,

without the least start, awaken'd, open'd his eyes, gave me a long, steady look, turning his face slightly to gaze easier—one long, clear, silent look—a slight sigh—then turn'd back and went into his doze again. Little he knew, poor death-stricken boy, the heart of the stranger that hover'd near." Such were the notes that went unchanged into the *Specimen Days*—mere hasty scribblings, yet showing now and then a rare literary art. To me the final moral impression from these memoranda is the comforting assurance—much needed in these days of realistic fiction—that human nature is not entirely bestialised by war. Whitman describes the horrors of the field after a battle with pathetic vividness, but above all he causes one to feel the great wave of idealism that swept over the country, bringing the hearts of men into unison, and lifting them out of themselves into a larger purpose. And with this goes the physical impression of endlessly marching troops, of interminable shadowy processions through the lonely roads of Virginia and in the streets of Washington.

To Whitman himself there came a deepening and purifying of his nature. He gave generously, prodigally, of his sympathy, and received his reward in the sure possession of peace; but under the physical strain something broke within him. From the age of fifty-four to his death at seventy-three (1892), he was an invalid, suffering more or less from paralysis. He travelled somewhat, but

most of the time he was at his home in Camden, or visiting at a farmhouse in the adjacent country. Henceforth his notes are largely made up of his communings with nature—scraps hastily written down out of doors, and palpitating at times with the immediate intoxication of the world's beauty. And this is the end of the record:

> Finally, the morality: "Virtue," said Marcus Aurelius, "what is it, only a living and enthusiastic sympathy with Nature?" Perhaps, indeed, the efforts of the true poets, founders, religions, literatures, all ages, have been, and ever will be, our time and times to come, essentially the same—to bring people back from their persistent strayings and sickly abstractions, to the costless average, divine, original concrete.

Artistically this return to nature meant for Whitman a revolt against the poetical conventions. He observed—as who has not?—a certain hollowness in almost all the poetry of the day, owing to the fact that it was not rooted in the realities of modern life. The rhythm was merely pretty, and had lost its vital swing; the primitive habits which had made it a bond of union by the clapping of hands and the beating of feet were too far in the past to lend it any communal force.[1]

[1] Mr. Bliss Perry in his Biography emphasises the fact that Whitman was not alone in this metrical revolt. In particular he calls attention to the remarkable parallel between Whitman's work and Samuel Warren's rhapsody, *The Lily and the Bee*, which was published in England

And the spirit of verse was equally a thing of the past. It was essentially a product of feudalism, and Tennyson was the last pale flower, exquisite indeed, but fragile and useless, of a civilisation which had shown its luxuriance in Shakespeare. In these traditions of form and spirit the poet was swathed until he sang no longer as a free individual man in touch with the universal currents of life, but was an empty echo of an outworn age, a simulacrum (this was the word Whitman applied to Swinburne) of vanished emotions. To restore poetry to its dominion over the present, therefore, Whitman would first of all abrogate the accepted rules of rhythm, and would allow his lines to swing, so he thought, with the liquid abandon of the waves and the winds. Feudalism should give place to democracy; there should be no more distinctions, but all things should be equally good and significant, the body with the soul, vice with virtue, the ugly with the beautiful, the small with the great. And he, Walt Whitman, would

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in 1851, promptly republished by Harpers, and reviewed in *Harper's Monthly* of November, 1851. The rhapsody describes a day and night passed in the Crystal Palace, but its real subject, avowed by the author, is "Man—a unity":

"In dusky, rainless Egypt now!
Mysterious memories come crowding round—
From misty Mizraim to Ibrahim—
Abraham! Joseph! Pharaoh's Plagues!
Shepherd Kings! Sesostris!
Cambyses! Xerxes! Alexander! Ptolemies! Antony! Cleopatra! Cæsar—

chant himself, lustily and unashamed, as a "simple separate person." So he would lead the people of America back to the *costless average*, *divine*, *original concrete*. Unfortunately, in breaking away from much that was undoubtedly a sham, he forgot too often those eternal conventions which grow out of the essential demands of human nature. Rhythm is such a convention, and where his broken prose is of a kind to strain the ear in the search for cadences which are not to be found, he simply, as Ben Jonson said of Donne, deserves hanging for not keeping accent. To bawl out that things unlike are like, is not to make them so, and a manly egotism, if too noisy, may sink into mere fanfaronade. For page after page Whitman is rather a preacher of poetry than a poet; and this perhaps may be his final condemnation, that he is persistently telling us how the true poem of to-day should be written instead of making such a poem. Preaching has its uses and may arouse the loftiest emotions, but its uses and emotions are not those of poetry. The simple truth is that a large number of Whitman's so-

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Isis! Osiris! Temples! Sphinxes! Obelisks! Alexandria!
The Pyramids.
The Nile!
Napoleon! Nelson!
—Behold, my son, quoth the Royal Mother, this ancient wondrous country—destined scene of mighty doings—perchance of conflict, deadly tremendous, such as the world has never seen, nor warrior dreamed of.
Even now the attracting centre of world-wide anxieties.

called poems are not only sermons, but dull and amorphous sermons. If they arouse in certain enthusiasts any sensation beyond that of a prosaic homily, it is because these generous readers bring with them the residual emotion arising from his work as a whole. Consider a few lines from the *Salut au Monde:*

What do you see Walt Whitman?
Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you.

. . . . . .

I see the places of the sagas,
I see the pine-trees and fir-trees torn by northern blasts,
I see granite bowlders and cliffs, I see green meadows and lakes,
I see the burial-cairns of Scandinavian warriors,
I see them raised high with stones by the marge of the restless oceans, that the dead men's spirits when they wearied of their quiet graves might rise up through the mounds and gaze on the tossing bil-

---

On this spot see settled the eyes of sleepless Statesmen—
Lo! a British engineer, even while I speak, connects the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, Alexandria and Cairo made as one—

. . . . . .

"A unit unperceived,
I sink into the living stream again!—
Nave, transept, aisles and Galleries,
Pacing untired; insatiate!
Touchstone of character! capacity! and knowledge!

lows, and be refreshed by storms, immensity, liberty, action.

I see the steppes of Asia,
I see the tumuli of Mongolia, I see the tents of Kalmucks and Baskirs,
I see the nomadic tribes with herds of oxen and cows, etc., etc.

Now it so happens that a contemporary of Whitman, who likewise undertook in his own way to vivify the enfeebled rhythms, and who sought, by returning to the spirit of Greece, to escape from mediæval feudalism, who wrote also much of his own feelings and was withal on occasion an undisguised preacher—it happens that Matthew Arnold in *The Strayed Reveller* has treated a very similar theme:

They see the Centaurs
In the upper glens
Of Pelion, in the streams,
Where red-berried ashes fringe

Spectacle, now lost in the Spectators; then spectators in the spectacle!

Rich; poor; gentle; simple; wise; foolish; young; old; learned; ignorant; thoughtful; thoughtless; haughty; humble; frivolous; profound!"

Whitman was a great reader of the magazines and no doubt saw this poem just at the time when he was beating about for his own new style. Both in form and spirit this is a really remarkable parallel. There needs but a touch of genius to fit the lines in with the most characteristic of Whitman's.

The clear-brown shallow pools,
With streaming flanks, and heads
Rear'd proudly, snuffing
The mountain wind.

. . . . . .

They see the Scythian
On the wide stepp, unharnessing
His wheel'd house at noon.
He tethers his beast down, and makes his meal—
Mares' milk and bread
Baked on the embers;—all around
The boundless, waving grass-plains stretch, thick-starr'd
With saffron and the yellow hollyhock
And flag-leaved iris-flowers.

Is it not plain, even from these fragmentary quotations, that Matthew Arnold has here accomplished what Whitman proposed as a poetical task? that he has transferred to the reader the actual vision instead of asserting what he himself had seen? And a good deal of Whitman's poetry is of this rudimentary sort. I find jotted down in the margins of my *Leaves of Grass* a dozen or more of such comparisons. There are lines in *Autumn Rivulets* which might be taken for the first rough draft from which Landor or Wordsworth elaborated his image of the inland shell; "Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy," sounds like a sketch for Longfellow's "Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State"; Shelley's *West Wind* is there in embryo, and clumsily distorted stanzas

of Gray and Horace. In a larger sense much of his verse is little more than a lusty preaching of what other men have dealt with creatively. His proclamation of health is good in its way, but long before him Scott had assimilated that doctrine into the breathing characters of his novels. I find no harm in Whitman's insistence on unashamed physical love, only surprise now and then to hear the language of the gutter from the pulpit; but for poetry I prefer Byron's creative assumption of that doctrine in the story of Haidée. Is not all the theory of Whitman's *Children of Adam* to be found there, turned to beautiful uses, in that picture of the two lovers brought together by mother Nature in the cavern by the starlit bay? Indeed, I am not sure but we might go further back and discover the modern sermon distilled by Lucretius into one perfect sensuous verse:

Et Venus in silvis iungebat corpora amantum.

Were this all, Whitman might be dismissed to Messrs. Traubel & Burroughs, and to his excitable British champions, without further ado; but it is by no means all. Again and again when Whitman forgets his doctrine and hearkens to his inspiration, he shows himself a poet in the simplest acceptation of that term. There are single lines here and there, such as the oft-quoted "White arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing," which have a magical power of evoking

an image or the memory of subtle sounds and odors. There are phrases, such as his "vigorous, benevolent, clean," that almost condense a system of morals into an epigram; paragraphs that hold the true poetic emotion and stand out from their context like those half-evolved figures of Rodin struggling from their matrix; short poems, such as *The Singer in the Prison*, that might take their place unabashed in any anthology; long poems, such as *Out of the Cradle* and *When Lilacs Last*, that show a grandiose, if somewhat stumbling, craftsmanship. And it should be observed that his rhythm in these successful passages is by no means so lawless as he himself and others have supposed. Occasionally it resembles the movement in the short rhymeless lines of Matthew Arnold, but in general it is markedly dactylic. Perfect hexameters abound:

Shouts of demoniac laughter fitfully piercing and pealing

and

Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness.

From these the variation is gradual--

Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice. . . .

Curious in time I stand, noting the efforts of heroes. . . .

In a far away northern county in the placid pastoral region—

to a solution of the verse into pure prose. The prevalent effect is that of a hexametric cadence

such as probably preceded the regular schematisation of the Homeric poems, now following its own inner law at the expense of external form, and now submitting to no law at all, but sprawling in mere uncouth ignorance.

And when he succeeds, Whitman stands naturally with the great and not the minor poets. Take, for instance, these three familiar poems by Browning and Tennyson and Whitman on the same theme, and Whitman, though not at his highest here, is still not out of place:

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go. . . .
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past!
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,

O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

Whispers of heavenly death murmur'd I hear,
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes, wafted soft and low,
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current flowing, forever flowing,
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of human tears?)

I see, just see skyward, great cloud-masses,
Mournfully slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing,
With at times a half-dimm'd sadden'd far-off star,
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition rather, some solemn immortal birth;
On the frontiers to eyes impenetrable,
Some soul is passing over.)

Browning's lines are beaten out with a superb vigour, but in substance they express only the crude individualism of a man who sees nothing beyond his personal emotions, who will contend for these face to face with the Arch Fear, that great contemner of persons, and thinks to carry them into the silence of the grave. Tennyson, the poet of universal law, has caught up into one luminous throbbing image the merging of the soul into the great tides of being from whence it sprung, while still the idea of personality is not entirely lost, but changed into a kind of mystic symbol. It is notable that Whitman, who posed before the world as the upholder of rank egotism, shows less of this quality in the presence of death than either of his great contemporaries. Here all thought of self is lost in a vague *rapport*, as he would say, with the dim suggestions of whispering, cloud-wrapped night; here is a perception of spiritual values far above the anthropomorphism of Browning, and a power of evoking a poetical mood, when once we have trained our ear to bring out his rhythms, as strong, though not as permanent, as Tennyson's. In this note of almost pantheistic revery, the lines may represent a departure from Whitman's earlier manner, but in another respect they exhibit the most constant and characteristic of his qualities—the sense of ceaseless indistinct motion, intimated in the sound of ascending footsteps and of the unseen flowing rivers, expressed more directly in the

shifting clouds and the far-off appearing and disappearing star.

And this sense of indiscriminate motion is, I think, the impression left finally by Whitman's work as a whole,—not the impression of wind-tossed inanities that is left by Swinburne, but of realities, solid and momentous, and filled with blind portents for the soul. Now the observer seems to be moving through clustered objects beheld vividly for a second of time and then lost in the mass, and, again, the observer himself is stationary while the visions throng past him in almost dizzy rapidity; but in either case we come away with the feeling of having been merged in unbroken processions, whose beginning and end are below the distant horizon, and whose meaning we but faintly surmise:

All is a procession,
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.

The explanation of this effect is in part simple. The aspect of nature never forgotten by Whitman in town or field is the sea, and always the sea in motion. He is on the beach listening "As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song," and looking out upon the "troops of white-maned racers racing to the goal." The endless rush of the ferries is in the substance of his verse as it formed a part of his life, and the quick pulsations of Broadway are equally there:

Thou of the endless sliding, mincing, shuffling feet!
Thou, like the parti-coloured world itself—like infinite teeming, mocking life!
Thou visor'd, vast, unspeakable show and lesson!

And the world itself is an Open Road,—"the long brown path before me," he calls it, "leading wherever I choose." Only as adding to the freedom and spaciousness of this sliding panorama can the "cataloguing" portions of Whitman's book find any justification.

From these material images it is an easy transition to the vision "Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand roads of the universe." Out of the infinite past he beholds himself climbing, as it were, up the long gradations of time:

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon. . . .

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

And in the future, the soul, like Columbus dreaming of ever new worlds, perceives for itself other unending voyages:

As if some miracle, some hand divine unseal'd my eyes,
Shadowy vast shapes smile through the air and sky,
And on the distant waves sail countless ships,
And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.

It was the same symbolism in the *Passage to India* ("Passage to more than India!" as the refrain becomes) which led Whitman to speak of that poem to Mr. Traubel as containing, in the jargon of Mickle Street, "the essential ultimate me" and "the unfolding of cosmic purposes."

To most men, when their eyes within are opened, that spectacle brings a feeling of painful doubt. The mere physical perception of innumerable multitudes jostling forward with no apparent goal, contains an element of intellectual bewilderment for the observer. His own identity is suddenly threatened, and the meaning of his existence becomes as obscure to him as that of the alien individualities that crowd his path. And when this spectacle, as it does with some men, passes into an intuition of vast shadowy fluctuations in the invisible world, the bewilderment grows to a sense of terror, even of despair. It is the tonic quality of Whitman—the quality for which his sane readers return to him again and again—that his eyes were opened to this vision, and that he remained unafraid. All the vociferousness of his earlier poems is little more than a note of defiance against the thronging shapes that beset him. But I think it was something more than his obstreperous individualism

that saved him in the end. Look into his face, especially in the noble war-time picture of him called the Hugo portrait, and you will be struck by that veiled brooding regard of the eyes which goes with the vision of the seer. He felt not only his personal identity entrenched behind walls of inexpugnable egotism, but he was conscious, also, of another kind of identity, which made him one with every living creature, even with the inanimate elements. He was no stranger in the universe. The spirit that gazed out of his own eyes into the unresting multitude looked back at him with silent greeting from every passing face. And it was chiefly through this higher identity, or sympathy, that he cast away fear. He chants its power in a hundred different ways—now crudely pronouncing himself this person and that, and again merely declaring that all persons are the same and equally good to him, now denying all distinctions whatsoever. He gave it a mystical name:

> Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through me the current and index.
> I speak the *pass-word primeval;* I give the sign of *democracy.*

The word has been caught up by certain of his disciples and made the pass-word for admission into Whitman clubs and the key to unlock the society of the future. As the poet of democracy he is supposed to have relegated all preceding

literatures and religions to the dust heap, and to have inaugurated a new era of civilisation. Now, undoubtedly he did represent in a way the political and physical aspects of America before the war—its large fluctuations of population, its sense of unfulfilled destiny. But for the problems confronting the actual militant democracy I cannot see that his poems have any answer. "Salvation can't be legislated" was the phrase with which he warned off the labour agitators and heralds of reform who sought his assistance in the later years. I fear that the working-man to-day who should undertake to follow his doctrine of *insouciance* would soon learn that loafing may be something very different from an invitation to the soul. There may be inspiration for the self-reliant individual in Whitman, but even more than Emerson's his philosophy is one of fraternal anarchy, leaving no room for the stricter ties of marriage or the state. It is curious that throughout his works you will find scarcely an intimation of the more exclusive forms of love or friendship which furnish the ordinary theme of poetry. In that universe of unresting motion into which he gazed he could discover neither time nor place for the knitting of those more enduring unions. Camarado! was his word, the cry from one man to another as they meet in the streaming procession, walk together for a little way with clasped hands, and then with the kiss of parting separate, each to his own end. This, and no

political programme, is, as I understand it, the meaning of the pass-word primeval, democracy.

Only with Whitman's experience of the war, and his daily familiarity with death, do we catch the first note of that deeper mysticism which looks through the illusion of change into the silence of infinite calm. I have been struck by the fact that it was the battle-fields of Virginia that first revealed to him the stars and their infinite contrast with this life of ours. He is describing "these butchers' shambles" in his *Specimen Days*, when suddenly he seems to have become aware of the full glory of the sky: "Such is the camp of the wounded—such a fragment, a reflection afar off of the bloody scene—while all over the clear, large moon comes out at times softly, quietly shining. Amid the woods, that scene of flitting souls—amid the crack and crash and yelling sounds—the impalpable perfume of the woods—and yet the pungent, stifling smoke—the radiance of the moon, looking from heaven at intervals so placid—the sky so heavenly—the clear-obscure up there, those buoyant upper oceans—a few large placid stars beyond, coming silently and languidly out, and then disappearing—the melancholy, draperied night above, around."—It was out of such material as this, written hastily in little pocket note-books, that the *Drum-Taps* were later constructed. One of the poems, the earliest in which this pathetic fallacy of the sky appears, connects Whitman with Homer:

I see before me now a travelling army halting,
Below a fertile valley spread, with barns and the orchards of summer,
Behind, the terraced sides of a mountain, abrupt, in places rising high,
Broken, with rocks, with clinging cedars, with tall shapes dingily seen,
The numerous camp-fires scatter'd near and far, some away up on the mountain,
The shadowy forms of men and horses, looming, large-sized, flickering,
And over all the sky—the sky! far, far out of reach, studded, breaking out, the eternal stars.

It is a picture, roughly-limned, yet comparable in its own way with that scene in the *Iliad* which Tennyson has translated so magnificently:

> And these all night upon the bridge of war
> Sat glorying; many a fire before them blazed:
> As when in heaven the stars about the moon
> Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,
> And every height comes out, and jutting peak
> And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
> Break open to their highest, and all the stars
> Shine.

Almost, in such passages as these, it would seem as if the familiarity with death had drawn for Whitman the last curtain of initiation; almost he stands like Emerson's young mortal in the hall of the firmament,—"On the instant, and incessantly, fall snow-storms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that . . . Every moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract

him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,—they alone with him alone." To that diviner glimpse Whitman never quite attained, and this is well, for in attaining it he would have passed beyond the peculiar inspiration which makes him what he is. He had been haunted by the idea of death as a boy, and had associated it with the breaking of the sea-waves on the beach. It was the supreme symbol of change, beautiful and beneficent, purging and renewing, yet still a gateway into new roads, and never a door opening into the chambers of home. Such a character it retains, indeed, in the later poems, but its ministration strikes nearer the heart of things:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Even in his chant, *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd*, it is notable that he instinctively chooses for his picture the dead President on that long westward journey, with the crowds thronging to behold the passing train. He is still haunted by the thought of endless progress and

procession, although in the same poem is to occur that wonderful hymn to the Deliverer:

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all.

He lacked the rare and unique elevation of Emerson from whom so much of his vision was unwittingly derived, but as a compensation his temperament is richer than the New England poet's, and his verbal felicity at its best more striking. I do not see why Americans should hesitate to accept him, with all his imperfections and incompleteness, and with all his vaunted pedantry of the pavement, as one of the most original and characterisic of their poets; but to do this they must begin by forgetting his disciples.

WILLIAM BLAKE

After all the editorial care bestowed on Blake it seems incredible that we should have had to wait until this late day for an authentic text[1] of his poems; yet such is the fact. Some of the emendations of the earlier editors were pardonable in a way, and if these gentlemen had been satisfied with correcting obvious slips of grammar where the sense or rhythm was not involved, I for one should be slow to censure. But they have gone far beyond that. Take, for example, one of the most characteristic and perfect of Blake's epigrams:

> Mock on, Mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau;
> Mock on, Mock on; 't is all in vain!
> You throw the sand against the wind,
> And the wind blows it back again.
>
> And every sand becomes a Gem
> Reflected in the beams divine;
> Blown back they blind the mocking eye,
> But still in Israel's paths they shine.

[1] *The Poetical Works of William Blake.* A new and verbatim text from the manuscript, engraved and letter-press originals. With variorum readings and bibliographical notes and prefaces. By John Sampson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1905.—The text is also published in a smaller volume, without the notes, and with an introduction by Walter Raleigh.

Can any one explain by what right Mr. W. B. Yeats should have changed the first "sand" to "dust" and the second to "stone"? From all these impertinences, and they are pretty numerous, Mr. John Sampson has delivered us by printing the text as it left Blake's hands. In some cases the fulness of his notes almost gives us the advantage of having the poet's actual manuscript under our eyes. A notable instance of this is furnished by the best-known of the poems, "The Tiger," which has been printed with so many arbitrary variations that I need make no apology for quoting it here in its entirety, just as Blake meant it to be:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Mr. Sampson is justified in pointing here to "the terrible compressed force" of the two abrupt sentences in the line "What dread hand? & what dread feet?" and in comparing it with the languid punctuation of the Aldine text, "What dread hand and what dread feet?" He does good service also in showing that no manuscript authority exists for what Swinburne perversely calls a "nobler reading":

What dread hand framed thy dread feet?

The genesis of the correct form is not without interest as throwing light on Blake's mental processes—if it be not merely an illustration of the common truth of poets, *inspirantur eundo*. In Blake's MS. book this part of the poem originally stood as follows:

And when thy heart began to beat
What dread hand & and what dread feet
Could fetch it from the furnace deep
And in thy horrid ribs dare steep
In the well of sanguine woe
In what clay & in what mould
Were thy eyes of fury roll'd
What the hammer . . .

When he came to publish the poem in his *Songs of Experience* he first cancelled this weak five-line stanza; and then, seeing that the last line of the preceding stanza was left suspended without a predicate, he waived the difficulty by simply punctuating so as to make two abrupt questions, "What dread hand? & what dread feet?"—surely a lucky stroke which his editors need not have been at such pains to undo.

And even the frequent lapses of grammar and rhythm, whose correction, one must confess, does render the earlier editions pleasanter to read than Mr. Sampson's scrupulous fidelity, have a meaning for any one who desires to understand the workings of Blake's mind. The fact is that a well-disciplined or genteel Blake is inconceivable. "People are in general what they are made, by education and company, from fifteen to five and twenty," said Lord Chesterfield, whose Letters were published just when Blake was entering on those critical years. And Blake was to be a voice crying in solitary places against everything which that cultured Earl represented, against the established education and society of the times. That was an age sufficiently easy to comprehend, because it had formed for itself so clear an ideal. Its aim above all was to avoid immediate contact with realities, to interpose some layer of philosophic experience between a man's soul and the emotional shocks of life. There was feeling enough, as the tearful annals of the "females"

may prove, and there was, too, no lack of efficiency, as Chesterfield's own motto, *Suaviter in modo*, *fortiter in re*, may indicate; but both the heart and the will were trained to act through the mediation of approved formulæ. Probably the interest of most readers to-day, though wrongly in my opinion, is not so much with this main edifice of the age as with the scattered and blindly working forces that were sapping the very foundations of the structure. At every turn one comes upon traces of these subterranean currents. Against the official virtue of the Church and the polite horror of enthusiasm Wesley was preaching the immediate dependency of the soul on God. It was he who said of "the favourite of the age," Lord Chesterfield, "his name will stink to all generations"—as to our day, at least, it certainly does. And another rebel, to whom in marvellous guise the visible and invisible (to him strangely visible) worlds were commingled, Blake as a boy may have passed in London streets and with his precocious insight recognised as a brother—"a placid, venerable, thin man of eighty-four, of erect figure and abstracted air, wearing a full-bottomed wig, a pair of long ruffles, and a curious-hilted sword, and carrying a gold-headed cane—no vision, still flesh and blood, but himself the greatest of modern Vision Seers—Emanuel Swedenborg by name, who came from Amsterdam to London in August, 1771." Much in later years Blake was to learn of the New Jerusalem from

this man's books, and much of his doctrine he was to reject. And in literature a number of men just at this time were undertaking to deny the validity of experience and seeking for poetry in the childhood of the race. In 1760 Macpherson began to publish his pseudo-translations from the Gaelic; in 1765 Percy brought out his first *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry;* and a year or two later a poor boy of Bristol—a child almost—might be seen lying on the sward before the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, dreaming his monkish rhymes of the fifteenth century. We must not forget that notable scholars of the day were to wage battle for the authenticity of these Rowley poems, and that at least one dignitary of the Church was to rank them in excellence above Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton.

Cynical men of the world, such as Horace Walpole, and masters of traditional learning, such as Thomas Gray, felt the influence of these subterranean streams and showed it in their works, but only a genius entirely innocent of the schools and of the world, I think, could have been so acutely sensitive to all these vaguely comprehended forces; only such an one could have surrendered himself to be for them a spokesman so single-minded in purpose as to have seemed to his own generation, if indeed not to ours also, a babbler and a maniac. William Blake was born in London in 1757. His father (our Celtic friends will have him, like all fathers of genius, of Irish

extraction) was a hosier in a small way who lived over his shop in Broad Street. William, the second child in a family of five, seems to have gone without any regular education. We hear of his wandering much in the suburbs and of the strange visions that haunted his boyhood. One day, sauntering on Peckham Rye he beholds a tree filled with angels, whose wings gleam among the leaves like stars; and on relating the incident at home he just escapes a thrashing from his father for telling a lie. At the age of ten he was put to the drawing school of Mr. Pars in the Strand. Four years later he was apprenticed to learn the trade of engraving. His father planned first to place him under Ryland, an artist of some reputation, but the boy objected. "Father," said he, as they left Ryland's studio, "I do not like the man's face; it looks as if he will live to be hanged!" And in due time that uncanny prophecy was fulfilled. In deference, therefore, to the boy's wishes he was apprenticed to the engraver James Basire, under whom he worked diligently and successfully. After a little while he was sent out to make drawings of the monuments and buildings which Basire was engaged to engrave for Gough, the antiquary of whom Walpole has so much to say. Much of this time he passed in Westminster Abbey, locked up by the verger alone with the solemn memorials of the dead—yet not alone, for in that silence of the tombs intimate visitations came to him of Christ

and the apostles, and taught him the secrets of the spiritual world.

In 1782 he married Catherine Sophia Boucher, a pretty brunette, who served him to the end as few men of genius have ever been served. Crabb Robinson, the ubiquitous, called on her after the poet's death and found her, notwithstanding her poor and dingy dress, a woman with a good expression on her countenance and a dark eye, showing the remains of youthful beauty. She had, he says, the wifely virtue of virtues—an implicit reverence for her husband. She believed in his visions as absolutely as Blake did himself, and once remarked to him, in Robinson's presence: "You know, dear, the first time you saw God was when you were four years old, and he put his head to the window and set you a-screaming." Certainly Blake needed such a helpmate, for his life henceforth was to be one of continual toil and small remuneration. For years he practically depended for support on a certain Mr. Butts who bought his plates at the price of a guinea each.

One episode stands out from the dull monotony of his career. In the year 1800, the busy and versatile Hayley—then residing not at romantic Eartham where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had sought peace,[1] but in a marine cottage at Felpham,

[1] Alas for these hopes! July 29, 1792, Cowper is writing to Hayley: "I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and

some six miles away—asked Blake to engrave the illustrations for the life of Cowper which he had undertaken to write. Blake accepted the invitation, and for three years he and his wife dwelt in a little cottage near by, on the Sussex Downs. Here, for awhile, he was buoyantly happy. "Felpham is a sweet place for study," he writes to his friend Flaxman "because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates: her windows are not obstructed by vapors; voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses." In this disposition of content it was small matter to him that he was poor and that the true work of his imagination was scoffed at by the world. "Now begins a new life," he says in the same letter, "because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers

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wish it were otherwise; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham."—In less than two months he is writing from this earthly Paradise to Lady Hesketh: "This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld or expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as

filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and those works are the delight and study of archangels. Why, then, should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality?" Many a visitation of poet and saint, "majestic shadows, grey but luminous," descended upon him as he paced his tiny garden or looked out over the glory of the sea; many a gleam of radiant fancy lightened his labours. "Did you ever see a fairy's funeral, madam?" he once asked a lady who happened to sit by him at a company during these days. "I have, but not before last night. I was walking alone in my garden; there was great stillness among the branches and flowers and more than common sweetness in the air; I heard a low and pleasant sound, and I knew not whence it came. At last, I saw the broad leaf of a flower move, and underneath I saw a procession of creatures, of the size and colour of green and grey grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose-leaf, which they buried with songs, and then

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they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better,—it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels itself peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains,—a wilderness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little."

disappeared. It was a fairy funeral!" But this state of contentment could not endure. The tasks set him by so inconsequent and commonplace a creature as Hayley lay like lead on his spirit. And at bottom he was not in sympathy with the country. In his letters, one begins to get glimpses of a seething turmoil within his breast. "Temptations are on the right hand and on the left," he cries out. "Behind, the sea of time and space roars and follows swiftly. He who keeps not right onwards is lost; and if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear and tremble!" And later, to the same friend: "But, alas! now I may say to you—what perhaps I should not dare to say to any one else—that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyed, and that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, see visions, dream dreams, and prophesy and speak parables, unobserved, and at liberty from the doubts of other mortals." He was not the first to find in the crowded life of a great city a solitude deeper than that of the remote village or the deserted field. We will not follow him to his new London homes, nor recall the clouds of care and poverty that drew about him until his death in 1827. It will be sufficient to quote a part of Crabb Robinson's graphic account of the man and of his conversation:

> He has a most interesting appearance. He is now old (sixty-eight), pale, with a Socratic countenance and an expression of great sweetness, though with something of

languor about it except when animated, and then he has about him an air of inspiration. The conversation turned on art, poetry, and religion. . . . He spoke of his paintings as being what he had seen in his visions. And when he said "my visions," it was in the ordinary unemphatic tone in which we speak of every-day matters. In the same tone he said repeatedly, "The Spirit told me." I took occasion to say: "You express yourself as Socrates used to do. What resemblance do you suppose there is between your spirit and his?"—"The same as between our countenances." He paused and added, "I was Socrates"; and then, as if correcting himself, said, "a sort of brother. I must have had conversations with him. So I had with Jesus Christ. I have an obscure recollection of having been with both of them." I suggested, on philosophical grounds, the impossibility of supposing an immortal being created, an eternity *à parte post* without an eternity *à parte ante*. His eye brightened at this, and he fully concurred with me. "To be sure, it is impossible. We are all coexistent with God, members of the Divine body. We are all partakers of the Divine nature. . . ." He professes to be very hostile to Plato, and reproaches Wordsworth with being not a Christian, but a Platonist. It is one of the subtle remarks of Hume, on certain religious speculations, that the tendency of them is to make men indifferent to whatever takes place by destroying all ideas of good and evil. I took occasion to apply this remark to something Blake had said. "If so," I said, "there is no use in discipline or education,—no difference between good and evil." He hastily broke in upon me: "There *is* no use in education. I hold it to be wrong. It is the great sin. It is eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was the fault of Plato. He knew of nothing but the virtues and vices, and good and evil. There is nothing in all that. Everything is good in God's eyes. . . ." Of himself,

he said he acted by command. The Spirit said to him, "Blake, be an artist, and nothing else." In this there is felicity. His eye glistened while he spoke of the joy of devoting himself solely to divine art. Art is inspiration. When Michael Angelo, or Raphael, or Mr. Flaxman, does any of his fine things, he does them in the Spirit. Blake said: "I should be sorry if I had any earthly fame, for whatever natural glory a man has is so much taken from his spiritual glory. I wish to do nothing for profit. I wish to live for art. I want nothing whatever. I am happy."

It is well for him that he believed his works to be famed in heaven, for on earth they were almost unknown. His poetry, indeed, can scarcely be said to have been published at all. In 1783, by the help of a few friends, a slender volume of his *Poetical Sketches*, consisting of only thirty-eight leaves, was privately issued without publisher's or printer's name, and with this modest Advertisement: "The following Sketches were the production of untutored youth, commenced in his twelfth, and occasionally resumed by the author till his twentieth year," etc. His other books, beginning with the *Songs of Innocence* in 1789, were produced by an original method which he called "illuminated printing." By a process of etching, the text and interwoven illustrations were left raised on small copper plates, and from these printed by the author on sheets of paper which he bound together in a sheaf. The illustrations he filled in with flat water-colours. An edition was commonly a single copy, struck

off when a chance customer appeared. Lucky the man to-day who owns one of these priceless books; fortunate if he can so much as handle one of them and see with his own eyes the mystical marriage of form and language.[1] Lyrical poetry we have always defined by its relation to music, but here we must accept a new genre and take painting instead of melody as ancillary to words. On the whole, it must be said that Blake is greater, at least more complete, as an artist than as a poet; and this, I think, is due mainly to his superior discipline as a draftsman. In verse he never produced anything more exquisite than some of his juvenile songs; in drawing he grew in power to the end, and his noblest designs are the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, engraved by him in his seventieth year. One feels the conscious artist in such work as this, whereas his success with words seems somehow always to be the result of accident.

But if he was never quite certain of his art as a poet, he was at all events fully aware of his hostility to the reigning school of the day. It is nothing less than miraculous that a cockney lad in the full eighteenth century should have written such stanzas as these *To the Muses:*

[1] This pleasure I myself owe to the liberality of Mr. Robert Hoe, whose superb library contains several of the original Blakes.

Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the sun, that now
From antient melody have ceas'd;

Whether in Heav'n ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the earth,
Or the blue regions of the air
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,
Beneath the bosom of the sea
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,
Fair nine, forsaking Poetry!

How have you left the antient love
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move!
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!

Here once more is that verbal magic which had not been heard in English since the last echo of the Elizabethans had died away—a rediscovery more remarkable, I am inclined to think, than the passionate realism of Burns or the homely intimacy of Cowper. Blake's reading, in fact, was chiefly among those older poets, and at times a line of his or a brief passage strikes the true Elizabethan ring, as in this quaint couplet:

When silver snow decks Sylvia's clothes,
And jewel hangs at shepherd's nose.

But more often a poem will begin with some distinct reminiscence of Shakespeare or Spenser, only to pass into a liquid, lisping mysticism far

removed from the spirit of those robuster poets of the world. Such a song as the following might be classed as standing midway between Shakespeare and Poe :

Memory, hither come,
And tune your merry notes;
And, while upon the wind
Your music floats,
I 'll pore upon the stream
Where sighing lovers dream,
And fish for fancies as they pass
Within the watery glass.

I 'll drink of the clear stream,
And hear the linnet's song;
And there I 'll lie and dream
The day along:
And when night comes, I 'll go
To places fit for woe,
Walking along the darken'd valley
With silent Melancholy.

At bottom his work is not so much an attempt to revive an earlier art as a personal revolt against the present. He sought above all that immediacy of impression which it was the chief aim of the age to avoid. Thus, Gray and Blake are both struck by the resemblance of man's ephemeral life to the little orbit of the summer insects. With the scholar of Cambridge this simple image becomes involved in ample and stately language:

To Contemplation's sober eye
Such is the race of Man:

And they that creep, and they that fly,
Shall end where they began.
Alike the Busy and the Gay
But flutter thro' life's little day,
In Fortune's varying colours drest;
Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance,
Or chill'd by Age, their airy dance
They leave, in dust to rest.

Methinks I hear, in accents low,
The sportive kind reply:
Poor moralist! and what art thou?
A solitary fly!

It is not the least service of Mr. Sampson's volume that his notes show in the most striking manner how carefully Blake cherished the simplicity of his vision. Here we may see the first sketch of Blake's poem, which sounds almost like a clumsy reminiscence of Gray:

Woe! alas! my guilty hand
Brush'd across thy summer joy;
All thy gilded painted pride
Shatter'd, fled. . . .

But this was altered for publication in the *Songs of Experience*, thus:

Little Fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance,
And drink, & sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

I do not say that Blake is here more successful than Gray: on the contrary, I am convinced that his method when carried to its extreme is more disastrous to poetry than the most rigid convention of the century; but the difference of his procedure from Gray's is unmistakable. You feel in these tripping lines, disburdened of all rhetoric, that Blake has his mind directly on a particular incident and its application to himself, whereas Gray is concerned more with the traditional experience of mankind and its generalised expression.

And this immediacy reaches with Blake far deeper than the shell of language and metrical form. It was a theory on which he harped unceasingly that imagination was not the daughter of memory, as the Greeks would have it, but a faculty of direct vision:

We are led to believe a lie,
When we see with, not through, the eye.

We have seen how as a guest at Felpham he lived in the midst of these imaginary forms. Late in life he became acquainted with John Varley, the water-colour artist, who used to feed a rather morbid craving for the supernatural by calling on Blake to portray these aërial visitants. "Draw me Moses," he would say, "or David, or the man who built the pyramids"; and Blake would sketch

out the face with the utmost rapidity, looking up from time to time as if the object were really before him. One of these Spiritual Portraits was the famous "Ghost of a Flea," which no one who has beheld can ever forget. Southey, in *The Doctor*, quotes Darley's account of this strange occurrence:

> The spirit visited his [Blake's] imagination in such a figure as he never anticipated in an insect. As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power of the truth of these visions, on hearing of this spiritual apparition of a Flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw. He instantly said, "I see him now before me." I therefore gave him paper and pencil, with which he drew the portrait of which a facsimile is given in this number [of *A Treatise on Zodaical Physiognomy*]. I felt convinced, by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him; for he left off and began on another part of the paper to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the Flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch till he had closed it. During the time occupied in completing the drawing, the Flea told him that all fleas were inhabited by the souls of such men as were by nature blood-thirsty to excess, and were therefore providentially confined to the size and form of insects.

It is not to be wondered at that a man who felt himself to be in immediate contact with the spiritual world should have rejected the theology and morality of the day for a religion of his own.[1]

[1] For a curious parallel earlier in the century to Blake's rejection of the letter of religion and to his use of symbolism, see the lucubrations of the deist Thomas Woolston.

Those who have the courage to track his thought through the labyrinth of the so-called Prophetic Books will, when their first bewilderment has subsided, be astonished at the logical system that begins to appear through much of this amorphous imagery and grotesque verbiage. I shall not attempt to write an exegesis of those books, or to point out the rarer passages in them of pellucid beauty and wisdom. Mr. Swinburne has performed that task admirably well in his essay on Blake, and deserves special gratitude and recognition from one who takes offence at most of his critical work. But without entering into the details of Blake's system one may say that here, at least, is no compromise with the imagination. The business of the poet, he held, was to cleanse the eyes so as to discern the eternal ideas of Plato, not as the mere deductions of dialectic, but as real and palpable existences. "In eternity one thing never changes into another thing," he said, speaking the very language of the Academy; yet at bottom the state of his mind was more like that of the early Hindu philosophers than that of the followers of the Greek, and those who have been bewildered by the union in the Upanishads of childish nonsense with sudden flashes of spiritual insight may, by a strange anomaly of circumstances, find the nearest Occidental parallel to that combination in an English poet of the eighteenth century. And this resemblance is curiously enhanced by Blake's nomenclature. His state of

mind was not so much mythopœic as logopœic. As with the early sages of the Ganges, words of meaningless sound seem to have possessed a fascination for him, and to have assumed the force of supernatural entities. Some of these extraordinary names are evidently echoes in his memory of the sonorous syllables of "Ossian"; others, such as "Nobodaddy" for nobody's daddy, are puerile attempts at humour; while others again baffle all attempts at elucidation. They are employed, one soon discovers to his amazement, with perfect consistency and with a kind of idolatrous reverence. They are the shorthand, so to speak, of his philosophy, and they are something more than that; there was efficacy to Blake in their very utterance. But if this wisdom of immediate spiritual vision coming to us out of the babble of uncouth words has at first an extraordinary resemblance to the forest philosophies of India, the final impression left upon the reader is by no means the same. The Upanishads are not personal or anomalous, but represent the searching in remote ways of a whole people; whereas the very isolation of Blake in his age and country throws a kind of abnormal glamour over his work. "I am really drunk with intellectual vision," he exclaims. Instead of a profound universal experience, we have here the idiosyncrasy, if not the madness, of solitary introspection—so perilous is it to approach alone and unattended the inviolable sanctuary of truth.

Like Cassandra and Teiresias and the other prophets of Greece, the seeing mortal is cursed with confusion of speech for his audacity.

Certainly to most readers not a small part of the Prophetic Books is pure raving, whatever the ideas may be that lie concealed. For myself, I have been particularly struck by the relation between them and the lyrical poems—a relation not always of sequence in time, but of character. The travail of soul that went into the recording of those apocalyptic visions is like nothing so much as some Titanic upheaval of nature, accompanied with confused outpourings of fire and smoke and molten lava, with rending and crushing and grinding, and with dark revelations of the unspeakable abyss. And afterwards, in the midst of these gnarled and broken remains, he who seeks shall find scattered bits of coloured stone, flawed and imperfect fragments for the most part, with here and there a rare and starlike gem. Mr. Sampson has thrown light on this process of crystallisation by quoting copiously from the Prophetic Books in illustration of his text of the lyrical poems, and those who are curious in this matter may be referred particularly to his notes on *The Crystal Cabinet*, with the extracts from the *Jerusalem* and the *Milton* there given.

If any doubt as to the essential coherency of Blake's thought still remains, let the reader turn back from *The Crystal Cabinet* to the *Song* written, it is said, before the age of fourteen, in

which the same idea is expressed by the same metaphor:

How sweet I roam'd from field to field
And tasted all the summer's pride,
'Till I the prince of love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shew'd me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,
And Phoebus fir'd my vocal rage;
He [the prince of love] caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

There in germ may be found pretty much all the philosophy that ramifies so egregiously in the Prophetic Books. Out of the knowledge of life springs the moral law, having a beauty of its own, but holding the spirit of man within its bounds as in a golden cage. The true wisdom is nothing more than a recognition of the contrast between the states of Innocence and Experience—a contrast which he sets forth in the names given to the two collections of Songs, and in many a naïve parable:

I heard an Angel singing
When the day was springing:
"Mercy, Pity, Peace
Is the world's release."

Thus he sang all day
Over the new mown hay,
Till the sun went down,
And haycocks lookèd brown.

I heard a Devil curse
Over the heath & the furze:
"Mercy could be no more
If there was nobody poor,

"And pity no more could be,
If all were as happy as we."
At his curse the sun went down
And the heavens gave a frown.

Experience sets up in the Garden of Love the priest's chapel with "Thou shalt not" written over the door; experience teaches us to doubt the reality of our visions, to substitute reason for intuition, to mistrust the spontaneity of our emotions, to surrender our primitive impulses to the dictates of religion; experience is the fall of man, the sin of the world, above all the curse of the age in which Blake himself was to live and suffer and sing. The mission of his art, therefore, as of his theosophy, was to return to a condition of childlike innocence. There is no thought of retracing laboriously the path of experience; there is no image in his poems like

the picture of the haggard old man in *The City of Dreadful Night*, crawling

> From this accursed night without a morn,
> And through the deserts which have else no track,
> And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
> To Eden innocence in Eden's clime.

Rather his philosophy hints of revolutions of birth and rebirth, of experience returning naturally into the innocence from which it sprung. Occasionally in conversation he spoke of transmigration as a life-history of which in his own case he was fully conscious ; but more commonly, as in *The Mental Traveller* it is not so much a question of reincarnation as of mystical regeneration. "Whenever any individual rejects error and embraces truth," he says, "a Last Judgment passes upon that individual"; the evil of experience is wiped away, and the man becomes now and here as a child to whom the windows of heaven are opened.

It is the peculiar merit of his verse that it really gives the impression of childlikeness and a kind of dewy freshness. One feels this in a thousand places—in such lines as those to an infant, which Swinburne regards as the loveliest he ever wrote:

> Sleep, sleep: in thy sleep
> Little sorrows sit and weep;

and in such stanzas as these in which the poet's

song and the wild flower's song blend together to make a single melody:

As I wander'd the forest,
The green leaves among,
I heard a wild flower
Singing a song.

"I slept in the Earth
In the silent night,
I murmur'd my fears
And I felt delight.

"In the morning I went,
As rosy as morn,
To seek for new Joy;
But I met with scorn."

If one wishes to see the difference between this identification of the poet with the naïve emotions of childhood and the contemplation of these emotions through experience, let him compare these lines with Goethe's "Ich ging im Walde." Again, I do not mean that Blake is for this reason the higher poet; I mean merely to distinguish. The true commentary on Blake is to read him side by side with Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, where the beauty of childhood is seen frankly through the medium of memory, and there is no attempt to deny or escape the burden of experience. The result of Blake's method is in one sense curiously paradoxical. He was himself the sincerest of poets; his faculty of immediate contact is perfectly genuine, and yet the mood

induced in most readers is one perilously akin to affectation. We feel the aërial transparency and the frail loveliness of his inspiration, and for a moment and by a kind of ritualistic self-purgation we may identify ourselves with his mood—but only for awhile and at rare intervals. For the most part a little investigation will detect a slight note of insincerity in our enjoyment, and, having discovered this, we fall back on the poets who accept fully the experience of the human heart. We find something closer to our understanding, something for that reason wholesomer, in men like Wordsworth and Goethe—perhaps even in the more formal poets of Blake's own age. For after all it is not the office of the true poet to baffle the longing heart with charms of self-deception, and we are men in a world of men. The unmitigated admiration and the effective influence of Blake are to be found not among the greater romantic writers of the early nineteenth century, but among the lesser men—Rossetti, Swinburne, and their school—who in one way or another have shrunk from the higher as well as the lower realities of life.

THE THEME OF "PARADISE LOST"

It was not so very long ago that a professor of English in a great university had the audacity to declare in print that "no one nowadays would read *Paradise Lost* for pleasure!" The statement is a generalisation from the gentleman's own delinquencies mayhap, but it does unfortunately approach too near the actual truth to be comfortable. And partly, I think, Milton suffers this neglect because the true theme of his poem is not commonly understood, and the ordinary reader from false tradition allows his mind to seek out and dwell on what are not properly its characteristic beauties. For, apart from style and execution (in which no one would deny supreme excellence to Milton, so that these may be eliminated from the question), the underlying motive of a work has much to do with its abiding hold on our interest; and so true is this that a false opinion in regard to its motive may deprive a poem of the popularity rightly its due.

Now in order to the possession of this enduring vitality two distinct elements must enter into the constitution of an epic: it must be built upon a theme deeply rooted in national belief, and, further, the development of this theme must express, more or less symbolically, some universal

truth of human nature. The first requisite is indeed a truism of the critics, who find it fully satisfied in the Trojan war of Homer, in the wanderings of Æneas and the founding of Rome, in the political allegory of Dante. Milton himself, in recognition of this need, meditated for many years on the Arthurian wars as an epic subject, and, later, Tennyson did actually weave the fabulous story of the Round Table into his *Idyls of the King*. But this national interest alone is not sufficient. Behind it there must rest some great human truth, some appeal to universal human aspirations, decked in the garb of symbolism. The poet himself may not be fully conscious of this deeper meaning, and the manner of its involution is something quite different from the methods of the so-called school of symbolists, but there it must lie, hidden or manifest;—such a symbolic truth, for example, as we apprehend in the *Iliad*, whose scenes of battle as we read them come to typify, vaguely it may be, the inevitable stress and struggle of life. For, like those warriors on the Trojan plain, we are driven by an irresistible summons into the contention of the world, and still, like them, we are filled with futile longings for repose and with unappeased nostalgia. And the prize we strive for is like that strange, mysteriously gliding emblem of beauty and delight which lured the Achæans over the seas,—

> the face that launched a thousand ships.

Nor need we hesitate to let the imagination play freely with this least allegorical of poems, for even before the days of Herodotus Helen had become an evasive symbol of the beauty we seek and cannot find. She never was at Troy at all, the historian declares, but was hidden away in Egypt while a mere phantom shape appeared to the warriors; and this the Greeks discovered when they had sacked the city and "made clear to mankind the lesson that great wrongs are greatly punished by the gods."

These two elements, then, the basis in popular belief and the symbolic meaning, are equally indispensable to an epic and must exist side by side. If the national basis alone is present the poem loses its hold on the reading world as soon as its theme becomes antiquated. If it contains in symbolic guise some universal human truth but is not founded on what to the poet and his contemporaries seemed a vital and credible reality, it descends forthwith into the chill region of allegory; it may perhaps attract attention as a work of curiosity, but it can never come close to the heart and take firm hold on the affections.

So strong is the demand for a national basis in an epic that there have not been wanting scholars to regret that Milton finally forsook his original purpose of treating the Arthurian wars. But as a matter of fact, the fables of Arthur were in no wise bound up with English religion or tradition. They meant nothing to England then and mean

nothing to her now, whereas the story of Genesis was a living reality to the people and the most truly national theme at the poet's disposal. The minds of the people and their literature were saturated with Old Testament ideas. Thence came their religion and the force that sustained them in their rebellious fight for liberty. It is moreover a fact that something in the British temperament approached more nearly the Hebraic spirit than has that of any other people of history. The zeal of righteousness, the hard activity, the harshness of judgment, and even the inordinate desire for acquisition,—all these things made a subject from the Old Testament truly national in those times. And still to-day some echo of this note is heard in British verse; we catch it in Kipling's *Recessional*, in his *Hymn Before Action*, and in his most patriotic poem, *A Song of the English*.

But it is only too certain that this immediate appeal of *Paradise Lost* has been dulled by the lapse of time. The stories of Genesis do not strike us to-day as immediately and literally true; they even leave the average reader colder than the myths of ancient Greece, because they are drawn from a more restricted field of our human nature. And if you care to see how far the Hebraic machinery of Cromwellian England falls short of universal acceptance, you need only turn to the brilliant analysis of *Paradise Lost* in Taine, where the whole supernatural and earthly plan of the

poem is passed through the fires of French wit. And yet, incredible as it may sound,—and this is the very point at issue,—the ingenious Frenchman does not once mention the real theme of the poem he analyses and ridicules, the real theme which lies like a warming sun at the centre of this otherwise frigid system, and which lends to the whole scheme lasting and universal significance. The absolute verity of the Hebraic machinery, as it appeared to Milton and his contemporaries, gave to the work the necessary basis of realism and sanity; the symbolic meaning of its true but less flaunted theme carries it quite beyond the narrow claims of Puritanic England and associates it with the epics of the world.

Sin is not the innermost subject of Milton's epic, nor man's disobedience and fall; these are but the tragic shadows cast about the central light. Justification of the ways of God to man is not the true moral of the plot: this and the whole divine drama are merely the poet's means of raising his conception to the highest generalisation. The true theme is Paradise itself; not Paradise lost, but the reality of that "happy rural seat" where the errant tempter beheld

> To all delight of human sense exposed
> In narrow room nature's whole wealth, yea more,
> A heaven on earth.

This truth, indeed, we might have learned from Tennyson who, with a fellow-craftsman's sympa-

thetic insight, discerned what gave the poem its profound value and interest. Not the Titan angels or the roar of angel onset was to Tennyson the significant matter. "Me rather," he sings in his musical Alcaics,

> Me rather all that bowery loneliness,
> The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring,
> And bloom profuse and cedar arches
> Charm, as a wanderer out in ocean,
> Where some refulgent sunset of India
> Streams o'er a rich ambrosial ocean isle.

There lies, you may know, the veritable matter of *Paradise Lost*. It is the good fortune of English literature that the Hebraic preoccupations of her epic poet led him to adopt a theme whose origin is that ancient ineradicable longing of the human heart for a garden of innocence, a paradise of idyllic delights, a region to which come only "golden days fruitful of golden deeds." Turn where you will in mythology and literature, and you will find this pastoral ideal haunting the imagination of men; less pronounced possibly in early days when pastoral life was a reality, more emphasised as civilisation grows complex and carries us away from nature. Were one to attempt to display its universality by illustration, one would need to abridge the libraries of the world into a few pages. It is the Hesperian gardens of Homer to which Menelaus was to pass unscathed for his love of Helen's divine beauty,—

the land from which Tennyson borrowed his picture of

> the island-valley of Avilion;
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly.

It is the dream of a Golden Saturnian Age found among many peoples, and so well portrayed by Hesiod in his picture of the days when "men lived like the gods with careless heart, far off from labours and sorrow." It was the theme of the Sicilian idyls of Theocritus. From it Virgil drew the tenderest and most thrilling note of Latin, I had almost said of European, poetry:

> O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,
> Agricolas!

It is the Tir-nan-og of the Celts, the country of the young, the Land of the Living Heart as it used to be called, the old Paradise which to the Irish peasant lies everywhere near at hand though hidden from sight, a shadow-land indeed like the ideals which have invested Irish poetry with their mist of illusive beauty:

> All the way to Tir-nan-og are many roads that run,
> But the darkest road is trodden by the King of Ireland's son.
> The world wears on to sundown, and love is lost and won,
> But he recks not of loss and gain, the King of Ireland's son.
> He follows on forever, when all your chase is done,
> He follows after shadows—the King of Ireland's son.

And if in more modern literature we are sometimes disgusted with the puerilities and frigid conceits of Arcadias and Arcadian romances from Sannazzaro down, let us not forget that the greatest period of our own literature, the many-tongued Elizabethan age, where the very wildernesses of verse are filled with Pentecostal eloquence and

> airy tongues that syllable men's names,

let us not forget that the dramas and tales, the epics and lyrics, of that period, from Spenser to Milton, are more concerned with this one ideal of a Golden Age wrought out in some "imitation of the fields of bliss," than with any other single matter. Shakespeare's sweetest scenes are devoted to the idyllic Forest of Arden and to Perdita's shepherd home; and you may recognise his hand in a play of mixed authorship when King Henry cries out:

> Ah, what a life were this! how sweet; how lovely!

It is, the world over, youth's vision and age's dream of a happiness that never was on land or sea; it is the glimmering of those "trailing clouds of glory" which, to Wordsworth's fancy, follow us from somewhere afar off into the darkness of our birth.

It should seem that Milton aimed to combine all these fleeting impressions of a golden pastoral age and so to blend them as to produce one perfect picture of Eden.

> Not that fair field
> Of Enna, where Prosérpine gathering flowers,
> Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
> Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world; nor that sweet grove
> Of Daphne by Orontes, and the inspired
> Castalian spring might with this paradise
> Of Eden strive,—

he writes, and enlarges the comparison through a paragraph. There, in that garden, dwelt pure content and peace, simple desires and love and innocent cares. Thither came the messengers of the Lord, bringing with them the effulgence of the celestial courts, the beauty of whose pure light could rest lovingly on this unalienated home of joy. And there, the guardians of it all, dwelt the primal pair in undisturbed innocence,—

> For contemplation he, and valour formed;
> For softness she, and sweet attractive grace.

And there resided mutual love, the sweetness of whose influence has been told by many poets but by none so perfectly as by the creator of these garden scenes of Eden. In the night when the little tasks of the day are done and all things are calling to repose, we may hear the lovers reckoning up their measure of content. It is Eve who speaks:

> Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
> With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun,
> When first on this delightful land he spreads
> His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,
> Glistering with dew: fragrant the fertile earth
> After soft showers; and sweet the coming on

> Of grateful evening mild; then silent night,
> With this her solemn bird, and this fair moon,
> And these the gems of heaven, her starry train:
> But neither breath of morn, when she ascends
> With charm of earliest birds; nor rising sun
> On this delightful land; nor herb, fruit, flower,
> Glistering with dew; nor fragrance after showers,
> Nor grateful evening mild; nor silent night,
> With this her solemn bird; nor walk by moon,
> Or glittering starlight, without thee is sweet.

And when at the end she inquires why all night long these lights of heaven shine though he and she have closed their eyes in sleep, as if with the ceasing of their mutual consciousness of love there could be no meaning or purpose in that great display of beauty, then Adam replies to her:

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
> Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep;
> All these with ceaseless praise his works behold
> Both day and night. How often from the steep
> Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
> Celestial voices to the midnight air,
> Sole or responsive each to other's note,
> Singing their great Creator! oft in bands
> While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
> With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds
> In full harmonic number joined, their songs
> Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven.

And so talking, hand in hand, the first of human lovers pass alone on to their blissful bower, where under foot the violet, the crocus, and every beauteous flower broiders the ground with rich inlay. So high and pure is the theme and so

lifted up the style that we do not pause to consider that after all we are reading only what a score of Elizabethan poets have described, beautifully indeed but less sublimely, in their Arcadian idyls. Indeed if we wish to learn the true kinship of Milton's genius, we need only turn to the long "linked sweetness" of William Browne's *Pastorals*, and to the story of Amintas and Fida in particular, where all the delights of nature are pressed into a similar service of happy lovers:

O how the flowers (pressed with their treadings on them)
Strove to cast up their heads to look upon them!
How jealously the buds that so had seen them
Sent forth the sweetest smells to step between them,
As fearing the perfume lodged in their powers
Once known of them, they might neglect the flowers.

The details of the two scenes are different and the grand style of Milton is in Browne lowered by the search for pretty conceits, but the spirit is after all the same. In the groves of Tavistock, as in the garden of Eden, dwells love whose sweet

encouragement can make a swain
Climb by his song where none but souls attain.

With propriety this pastoral scene, with its symbolism that embraces some of the deepest desires and regrets of the human heart, is set in the middle books of the epic, just as a painter places the most important object of his picture in the centre of his composition and throws upon it

the highest light. Before and after are the darker hues that direct the eye infallibly to the dominant figure. In the two opening books stands that picture of the "regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace and rest can never dwell"; and as in the description of Paradise the poet gathered together beauties from all the fabulous gardens of antiquity, so here he shows nature given up to breeding

> Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
> Abominable, inutterable, and worse
> Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived,
> Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire.

And in the setting of this fiery gloom all the vices most contrary to idyllic happiness are presented in vivid poetical form by means of personification. As content may be called the crowning and creative virtue of the pastoral world, so Satan, the lord of the demonic crew, stands for pride and evil ambition. With him in that senate of hell are Moloch, grim and terrible, the destroyer of peace, who cries out for open violence; Belial, "than whom a spirit more lewd fell not from heaven," he who counsels "ignoble ease and perfect sloth" for the better working of his lust; Mammon, the prince of wealth and luxury, to escape whose contamination most of all things the poets laid out their simple gardens of content; and Beelzebub, greatest of all save Satan himself, who represents malice and hatred and every passion most abhorrent to the love and loving kindness

of Eden. Than this contrasted picture of utter darkness, this plotting of violence and revenge, and the exit of Satan through the guarded gates of hell, no more artistic preparation could be conceived for the idyllic scenes and virtues of Paradise.

In like manner, when temptation has crept into the garden and forever broken its charm, and when the guilty pair have awaked to a sense of their wretchedness, then Michael, the angel of the Lord, takes Adam to a high mountain and from there displays to him in the form of a vast panorama all the toil and pain and lingering strife of actual human history. It is the reality of life set like a shadow against the brief and golden dream of Paradise. Hand in hand, with solitary steps and slow, the man and woman go out into the harsh experiences of the world; but through all the generations of their children, through all the days of labour and degradation that are to succeed, the memory of that happy garden shall follow,— a memory at once and sweetest hope.

Many have found fault with the divine action interwoven through the epic, and it cannot be denied that Milton has, through his harsh Puritanic anthropomorphism, missed the higher mysteries of divinity. We may even go so far with Taine as to admit that something of primness, almost, it might be said, of priggishness, disfigures the celestial household. But looked at in a proper light, this action performs, nevertheless, a

needed office. The creation passages, for example, permit the poet, as if in anticipation of Lessing's *Laocoön*, to expand his pictorial scenes and to give them vital interest by throwing his descriptions into the form of consecutive narration. What would be intolerable as mere descriptive writing becomes vivid and truly poetical when we see the world grow into form and all its beauties one by one develop beneath the Creator's hand. But more than this, the celestial action lends to the poem the desired balance of art. By the malignant plotting of the demons, who in their evil propensities stand for a personification of the antithetic vices, the happy reality of Eden was changed to a lingering dream of memory. The counterpart of that demonic senate is shown in the councils of heaven, where in the colloquy of the Father and the Son we listen to the divine love whose power and wisdom, so the poet dreams, shall at the last restore to erring mankind the lost Paradise made perfect now against temptation and deceit. So is the humble tragedy in the garden of Eden lifted up in grandeur and significance until it is made to embrace the drama of salvation; and so the regret of memory is converted into the gladness of hope. Meanwhile for us who merely read and seek the exalted pleasures of the imagination, there lies between the scenes in hell and the panoramic vision of the world's shattered life that perfect and splendid vision of pastoral bliss. As Adam in his morning hymn gave thanks for the

glories of the outstretched and still uncontaminated earth, so almost we are ready to render praise to the poet's creative genius for this sweet refuge of retirement he has builded for the heart of our fancy.

THE LETTERS OF HORACE WALPOLE

In January of 1797 Lord Orford, then in his eightieth year and dying of the gout, but staunch of heart and clear of intellect as always, closed a letter to his faithful friend the Countess of Upper Ossory with these words—they were, so far as we know, the last he ever wrote or dictated: "Oh, my good Madam, dispense with me from such a task, and think how it must add to it to apprehend such letters being shown. Pray send me no more such laurels, which I desire no more than their leaves when decked with a scrap of tinsel and stuck on twelfth-cakes that lie on the shop-boards of pastry-cooks at Christmas. I shall be quite content with a sprig of rosemary thrown after me, when the parson of the parish commits my dust to dust. Till then, pray, Madam, accept the resignation of your ancient servant." Walpole was temperate in his modesty, as in everything else—except scandal—and knew that many of his letters were worthy of preservation; he even went so far as practically to prepare those to Horace Mann for the press; yet who can doubt his surprise, possibly his chagrin, if he had suspected the care that curious editors were to bestow on

his correspondence, and, in particular, if he had foreseen this latest superb edition into which every attainable bit of writing has been pressed, not without much learning of annotation?[1] Here is rosemary for remembrance, and leaves of laurel with a vengeance. I confess that my immediate thought on turning over the last page was the ungracious wish that some kind editor would now condense the fifteen volumes to four or five by leaving out the repetitions and the purely irrelevant; and in such a wish I think that Walpole himself would have been the first to concur. Indeed, there is room for a whole library of the expansive eighteenth-century writers so abridged that we should feel we were getting the real heart of an author without suffering from expurgations demanded by the parlour table or the schoolroom. It is a questionable compliment to the reader to print, as Mrs. Toynbee does, all the most insignificant scraps of correspondence and at the same time to suppress more vital passages here and there, which might offend a prudish taste.

And yet, if it came to that, who would have a

[1] *The Letters* of *Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford.* Chronologically arranged and edited with notes and indices by Mrs. Paget Toynbee. In sixteen volumes, with portraits and facsimiles. New York: The Oxford University Press, 1903–5.—The whole of the sixteenth volume is given up to genealogical tables and indices, which form not the least valuable part of the edition.

shorter edition of Walpole at the cost of the larger? For me, as Tennyson said, "I like those great *still* books," and could even desire "there were a great novel in hundreds of volumes that I might go on and on." My annoyance was due to a feeling that this long array of volumes would deter any but a few inveterate bookmen from opening them, and, still more perhaps, it was the critic's dismay at the difficulty of reporting in a single essay any adequate impression of so prodigious a work. Here are more than three thousand letters, extending over a period of sixty-five years and containing pretty much all of the eighteenth century. A whole essay might be devoted to Walpole's relation to art; for not only was he a distinguished antiquary and the author of *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, but his "gingerbread castle" at Twickenham was one of the principal factors in the revival of Gothic architecture, a museum of antiquities to which the curious flocked in such numbers as almost to drive the owner out of his home. Still more interesting would be a study of his literary taste. His own writing, like his architecture, helped to introduce the mania for spurious mediævalism; Chatterton's genius he admired warmly, despite the ill-treatment he received from the crazy Chattertonians, and he was friendly to the ballad poetry of Percy, though indifferent to the antiquarian enthusiasms of Warton. As for Macpherson, he first accepted the Ossianic epics as full of

shining beauties, and, later, led by his *flair* for rogues and angered by the Scotchman's support of Lord North, pronounced them "dull forgeries," duller than Glover's *Leonidas*. On the other hand, he "reprobated" Thomson, while falling into rhapsodies over Dr. Darwin's wire-drawn imitations of Pope. The fact is, his taste wavered uncertainly between the official classicalism of the age and the new stirrings of romance, even where politics did not intervene to warp his judgment. Johnson he never mentions otherwise than with contempt and aversion; and this is due in part to the Doctor's coarse habits and stilted language, but still more to his pugnacious Toryism. Hannah More tells of wrangling with Walpole over the merits of Pope, whom she preferred to his favourite Dryden, and here again we may suspect that Walpole is guided as much by his uncompromising hatred of the Bolingbroke faction as by his taste for Dryden's larger, freer style. To unravel his opinions would be to track the whole shifting literary movement of the age.

A highly diverting theme for the critic, no doubt, but no sooner should he become engaged upon it than he would find himself entangled in a vast spider-web of politics and party. It has, in fact, been well said, that "the history of England, throughout a very large segment of the eighteenth century, is simply a synonym for the works of Horace Walpole." For finished portraits after the manner of Clarendon and Burnet, or perhaps

more consciously in the school of the French moralists, one may turn to his memoirs of King George the Second and Third. There is nothing better in that kind in English than the vignettes, etched in aqua-fortis, of Chesterfield, Granville, Pelham, and his brother, the Duke of Newcastle, to name the first that come to mind. It is an art, altogether precious, that was lost in the early nineteenth century with the blunting of our sense of personality, and has never been regained. But to follow the political drama of those years with all the vivacity of immediate impression one must go to the letters themselves.

The first act is that incomparable daily record of Sir Robert Walpole's death-struggle with his enemies— ὡς δ' ὅτε κάπριον ἀμφί:

> So fares a boar whom all the troop surrounds
> Of shouting huntsmen and of clamorous hounds.

Then comes the long reign of the Pelhams with their endless intrigues and tergiversations, symbolised by the pathetic hands of Newcastle; "those hands," as Walpole pictures them, "that are always groping and sprawling, and fluttering, and hurrying on the rest of his precipitate person—but there is no describing them but as Monsieur Courcelle, a French prisoner, did t'other day: 'Je ne sais pas,' dit il, 'je ne saurais l'exprimer, mais il y a un certain tatillonnage.' If one could conceive a dead body hung in chains, always wanting to be hung somewhere else, one

should have a comparative idea of him." Meanwhile, a more impenetrable actor, Chatham, is playing with the map of the world, as he plays with his gout—at once statesman and mountebank. Bute, Grafton, and Lord North pass over the stage; while behind the scenes we catch glimpses of the sullen figure of George the Third pulling the wires and causing the puppets to speak, hear the shrill scolding of Junius from his hiding-place in the gallery, and tremble at the uproar of Wilkes and his mob in the pit; the Rockinghams and Shelburnes spin for a few hours in view—Whig within Whig like the wheels of Ezekiel's Cherubim.

Some of the scenes in this long-protracted drama can scarcely be matched outside of Tacitus or Saint-Simon. Most memorable of all, perhaps, is the ceremony at the interment of George II., with its grotesque shufflings of comedy and tragedy. We enter the solemn theatre of the Abbey, and behold about the corpse the irreverent mummers,—Archbishop Secker, who had been so eager to be near the new king before the old was yet buried that he trod on the Duke of Cumberland's foot; Cumberland himself, the "butcher Duke," uncle of the new king, and Newcastle, with their dark plottings and smouldering hostility over the regency. Walpole is fully conscious of all the human passions and vanities involved in the spectacle:

> The procession through a line of foot-guards, every

seventh man bearing a torch, the horse-guards lining the outside, their officers with drawn sabres and crape sashes on horseback, the drums muffled, the fifes, bells tolling, and minute guns, all this was very solemn. But the charm was the entrance of the Abbey, where we were received by the Dean and Chapter in rich copes, the choir and almsmen all bearing torches; the whole Abbey so illuminated, that one saw it to greater advantage than by day; the tombs, long aisles, and fretted roof, all appearing distinctly, and with the happiest chiaroscuro. . . . When we came to the chapel of Henry the Seventh, all solemnity and decorum ceased—no order was observed, people set or stood where they could or would, the yeomen of the guard were crying out for help, oppressed by the immense weight of the coffin, the Bishop read sadly, and blundered in the prayers the fine chapter, *Man that is born of a woman*, was chanted, not read, and the anthem, besides being unmeasurably tedious, would have served as well for a nuptial. The real serious part was the figure of the Duke of Cumberland, heightened by a thousand melancholy circumstances. He had a dark brown adonis [wig], and a cloak of black cloth, with a train of five yards. Attending the funeral of a father, how little reason so ever he had to love him, could not be pleasant. His leg extremely bad, yet forced to stand upon it near two hours, his face bloated and distorted with his late paralytic stroke, which has affected, too, one of his eyes, and placed over the mouth of the vault, into which, in all probability, he must himself so soon descend—think how unpleasant a situation! He bore it all with a firm and unaffected countenance. This grave scene was fully contrasted by the burlesque Duke of Newcastle. He fell into a fit of crying the moment he came into the chapel, and flung himself back in a stall, the Archbishop hovering over him with a smelling-bottle —but in two minutes his curiosity got the better of his

hypocrisy, and he ran about the chapel with his glass to spy who was or was not there, spying with one hand, and mopping his eyes with t' other. Then returned the fear of catching cold, and the Duke of Cumberland, who was sinking with heat, felt himself weighed down, and turning round, found it was the Duke of Newcastle standing upon his train to avoid the chill of the marble. It was very theatric to look down into the vault, where the coffin lay, attended by mourners with lights.

And this is the making of history! It would be interesting to compare the tragic pathos of such a letter with the sham terror of the same writer's *Castle of Otranto*.

The weakest part of Walpole's narrative is that which touches on the great movements outside of Parliamentary passions. If anywhere he may be called tedious, it is in the letters that pour out his prolonged wail over the wanton alienation of America and his shrill clamour against the French Revolution. His heart and mind were right in both cases, but the magnitude of the events shocked him out of his equilibrium of persiflage and left him dull and emphatic like other men. They had no place in the political philosophy which he had inherited from his father; for a philosophy of the simplest and most consistent sort he unquestionably possessed, the belief that liberty and the British constitution are one and inseparable, and that the constitution is nothing other than the balance of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy introduced by the settlement of Eighty-eight. Such a theory of government may seem both

scholastic and superficial. I am not so sure of that. At least, it was the formula of Bolingbroke, the working system of Burke and many of the century's wisest statesmen. Unfortunately, it drops into a tone of indolent cynicism when summed up, as Walpole was fond of expressing it, in the practical maxim of his father, *Quieta non movere.* And what was a sensitive, ease-loving gentleman, holding so comfortable a philosophy, to do in the presence of a world that was developing a terrible taste for mobs and revolutions? Move not what is quiet, quotha; alas, he was met by the ancient, stubborn fact—*e pur si muove!*

But these violent uprisings come in toward the end of Walpole's correspondence, and during all his more vigorous years he was witness of a stationary government where sleeping principles were supplanted by parties, and parties degenerated into pure faction. It was the age when a despicable trimmer and wriggler like Bubb Dodington could write out the story of his double-dealings as an apologia for his life; but it was the age also of Dr. Johnson, an era of liberated personalities, great and small, cunning and fatuous, wise and obtuse—but always interesting, as personality is, after all, the one thing of permanent, unchanging, universal concern. History at such a time naturally becomes a satirical study of society, and the value of Walpole's letters, especially those of the earlier volumes, is due chiefly to the causticity of a wit that could etch a variety of

characters and their *milieu* in strong, lasting lines. Altogether they form a social picture whose minuteness and realism no other English writer has equalled. In some respects the impression left by the whole period is not unlike that of the middle sixteenth century. The great passions that had been generated by political and religious upheaval lingered on, but, being deprived of their normal sustenance, worked themselves out in monstrous idiosyncrasies of character, which gradually subside into whims of an ever milder temper. In both ages the imagination, feeling the want of restraint, imported a model of poetic regularity from abroad and then, at the end, rebounded into an excessive romanticism. Surrey and Wyatt are as close a parallel to the school of Pope as Spenser and Sidney are to the school of Shelley. Such comparisons, however, are admittedly as dangerous as they are seductive, and the court of George the Second was, it need scarcely be said, very far from a replica of Edward the Sixth's.

It is safer to consider these liberated passions as an exaggerated illustration of traits that have always prevailed more or less in English society and literature. "Why was he sent into England?" inquires Hamlet; and the Clown replies with a turn that must have made the groundlings roar: "Why, because a' was mad: a' shall recover his wits there; or, if a' do not, 't is no great matter there. 'T will not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he." It reminds one of the

reflection that is constantly on Walpole's lips. He is struck by it during his first tour on the Continent. "The most remarkable thing I have observed since I came abroad," he writes from Florence, "is that there are no people so obviously mad as the English. The French, the Italians, have great follies, great faults; but then they are so national that they cease to be striking. In England, tempers vary so excessively, that almost every one's faults are peculiar to himself. I take this diversity to proceed partly from our climate, partly from our Government: the first is changeable and makes us queer; the latter permits our queernesses to operate as they please." And a few years later, in London, he introduces the extraordinary story of Lord Ferrers with the epigram: "Madness, that in other countries is a disorder, is here a systematic character." He never, I believe, connects this theory with Shakespeare's sapient grave-digger; it springs from his own observation, is his own way of saying what the wits of Queen Anne before him had accepted as a philosophy of life. Pope had used the "ruling passion strong in death" to point his panegyric as well as his satire:

> The ruling Passion, be it what it will,
> The ruling Passion conquers Reason still.

And Prior had turned it to a mock-heroic theory of *Alma*, the soul:

> We sure in vain the Cards condemn:
> Our selves both cut and shuffl'd them.

In vain on Fortune's Aid rely:
She only is a Stander-by.
Poor Men! poor Papers! We and They
Do some impulsive Force obey;
And are but play'd with;—Do not play. . . .
Mark then;—Where Fancy or Desire
Collects the beams of Vital Fire;
Into that Limb fair ALMA slides,
And there, *pro tempore*, resides.

The soul is not, as the men of Oxford hold, diffused throughout the body, nor does she, as the Cambridge wits contend, sit "cock-horse on her throne, the brain," but is all contracted into this or that member, from toes to head, as some master impulse governs the man.

Most commonly, the ruling passion of Walpole's characters is an overweening, undisciplined imperiousness of will, turned in upon itself and producing an egotism which only increases its insolence at the approach of death. "Old Marlborough is dying—but who can tell! last year she had lain a great while ill, without speaking; her physicians said, 'She must be blistered, or she will die.' She called out, 'I won't be blistered, and I won't die.' " And in truth she defied them all and the great Physician, too, for four years.[1] Another grande dame, the Princess

[1] Is it fanciful to compare this with a passage in the last sermon of Latimer preached before Edward the Sixth? —"For a certain great man, that had purchased much lands, a thousand marks by year, or I wot not what; a great portion he had: and so on the way, as he was in his

of Buckingham, natural daughter of James II., makes her ladies vow that, if she should lie senseless, they would not sit down in the room before she was dead. She had settled the ceremony of her funeral and had applied to the Duchess of Marlborough to borrow the triumphal car that had borne the Duke's body. "Old Sarah, as mad and proud as herself, sent her word that it had carried my Lord Marlborough and should never be profaned by any other corpse. The Buckingham returned, that 'she had spoken to the undertaker and he had engaged to make a finer for twenty pounds.' " But pride is not the only passion; avarice and stinginess are almost as common. Here is the Duchess of Devonshire at "her secular assembly which she keeps once in

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journey towards London, or from London, he fell sick by the way; a disease took him, that he was constrained to lie upon it. And so being in his bed, the disease grew more and more upon him, that he was, by his friends that were about him, godly advised to look to himself, and to make him ready to God; for there was none other likelihood but that he must die without remedy. He cried out, 'What, shall I die?' quoth he. 'Wounds! sides! heart! shall I die, and thus go from my goods? Go, fetch me some physician that may save my life. Wounds and sides! shall I thus die?' There lay he still in his bed like a block, with nothing but, 'Wounds and sides, shall I die?' Within a very little while he died indeed; and then lay he like a block indeed. There was black gowns, torches, tapers, and ringing; but what is become of him, God knoweth, and not I."

fifty years," "more delightfully vulgar at it than you can imagine," complaining of the dirty shoes of the men, and calling out at supper to the Duke, "Good God! my Lord, don't cut the ham, nobody will eat any!" And there is a less exalted person who sends for the undertaker before his daughter is dead, and cheapens the coffin on the plea that she may recover. Jealousy takes the form of my Lord Coventry, who, at a dinner in Paris, chases his wife, one of the rare Miss Gunnings, about the table, seizes her, scrubs the rouge off her face with a napkin, and swears he will carry her back to England.

Parliament is the great stage, where these whims and frenzies move their puppets most visibly to the world. Take a scene from one of the letters to Sir Horace Mann, at Florence, written during the frantic efforts of the Court party to keep Wilkes out of the House of Commons on the ground of atheism. One Martin has called him a "cowardly scoundrel," and they go off to Hyde Park, where Wilkes receives a bullet in his body. Meanwhile, on the same day, Lord Sandwich produces in the House of Lords

a poem, called an *Essay on Woman*, written by the same Mr. Wilkes, though others say, only enlarged by him from a sketch drawn by a late son of a late archbishop. It is a parody on Pope's *Essay on Man;* and, like that, pretending to notes by Dr. Warburton, the present holy and orthodox Bishop of Gloucester [" blasphemous " and "scurrilous," he calls him elsewhere]. It is dedicated

to Fanny Murray, whom it prefers to the Virgin Mary from never having had a child [we know this Fanny Murray from another letter. Sir Richard Atkins had once given her a twenty-pound note; "she said, 'Damn your twenty pound, what does that signify?'—clapped it between two pieces of bread and butter, and eat it "]; and it calls the ass a noble animal, which never disgraced itself but once, and that was when it was ridden on into Jerusalem. You may judge by these samples of the whole: the piece, indeed, was only printed, and only fourteen copies, but never published. Mr. Wilkes complains that he never read it but to two persons, who both approved it highly, Lord Sandwich and Lord Despencer [leader of the infamous Hell Fire Club of sham Franciscans at Medmenham Abbey]. The style, to be sure, is at least not unlike that of the last. The wicked even affirm, that very lately, at a club with Mr. Wilkes, held at the top of the playhouse in Drury Lane, Lord Sandwich talked so profanely that he drove two harlequins out of company. You will allow, however, that the production of this poem so critically was masterly: the secret too was well kept: nor till a vote was passed against it, did even Lord Temple suspect who was the author. If Mr. Martin has not killed him, nor should we, you see here are faggots enough in store for him still. The Bishop of Gloucester, who shudders at abuse and infidelity, has been measuring out ground in Smithfield for his execution; and in his speech begged the devil's pardon for comparing him to Wilkes.

And Walpole adds his comment on this mad scene: "We are poor pygmy, short-lived animals, but we are comical—I don't think the curtain fallen and the drama closed."

Not only history but the very seasons of the

year and the weather in this world become expressed in the language of personalities. Does winter linger beyond his date? Walpole will tell you there is "not a glimpse of spring or green, except a miserable almond tree, half opening one bud, like my Lord Powerscourt's eye." Does the Danish minister complain of the heat at the first levee of Lord Bute, the incoming favourite? George Selwyn is there to whisper in his ear: "Pour se mettre au froid, il faut aller chez Monsieur le Duc de Newcastle." It is this same George Selwyn who acts throughout as a kind of licensed jester to the motley crowd. Ghastly in a very literal sense is much of his wit, seasoned with his own ruling passion for hangings and similar grewsome scenes; ghastly in a more general way to us, like other faded things of a past age. Already long before he had left the stage, the young men at White's were laughing at his *bons mots* only by tradition, so Walpole laments; and to-day that laughter has grown thin, thin to extinction! But let us be charitable. Much may be forgiven him for his wish to see the comedy of *High Life Below Stairs* at Drury Lane, being weary of low life above stairs.

It is a question how far Walpole distorts the picture of this original society. Some heightening of the colour there must be; certainly one may read the letters of the pious Mrs. Montagu during the same years and about pretty much the same people, and feel one's self in the company of

insipid saints. My opinion is that Walpole does not use exaggeration so much as selection; he had that rare artistic vision which naturally interprets life in accordance with its own imperious needs, throwing this event into relief and passing by that so as to group the whole into a rational system. Partly this was the instinctive operation of his mind working in a congenial medium; but partly also it was, I think, the conscious labour of the born author. "For seven and twenty years," he writes to Sir Horace Mann, "I have been sending you the annals of Bedlam"; he knew pretty well the drift of these letters and what picture of society they were creating. Though they show no marks of having been composed with a public audience in view, they are something more than the ordinary clever correspondence; they are literature, just because they translate the jargon of events into the language of a dominating, constructive idea.

And they are not only themselves literature, but they are a prime source for understanding a large tract of English poetry and fiction. From the Elizabethan days to the Victorian, humours, in the old sense of the word, have furnished the British writer with half his material. Such themes, of course, are not confined or even original to England—far from that; but they have been peculiarly fruitful there. To Ben Jonson they gave both the light laughter of *Every Man in His Humour* and the savage indignation

of *Volpone;* he developed them into a school of art. The ruling passion of the Queen Anne wits is nothing more than these same humours dipped in gall by Dryden for the purposes of satire. Without them Fielding and Smollett would be robbed of half their characters. Sterne tricks them out as hobby-horses and sets all the world astride upon them, like children in a merry-go-round. Dickens repeoples the streets of London with their shadows, and Thackeray himself borrows them at will in their purest eighteenth-century form. He need not have gone to the Lord Hertford of his own day for his Marquis of Steyne, for Walpole would have served him abundantly with models—the old Duke of Somerset, for instance, waking after dinner and finding himself on the floor, and cursing his daughter, whose duty it was to watch him, to a year of complete silence. Is it not easy to imagine the girl wandering about the gloomy chambers of Gaunt House, avoided by the servants, who are forbidden to speak to her yet dare not show her any disrespect? This whole letter (to Sir Horace Mann, dated December 26, 1748) might almost pass for a chapter in *Vanity Fair*. Indeed, all these invented characters of poet and novelist assume a new and wonderful colour of reality when we see their counterparts walking through the actual history of Walpole's world. It was the crowning virtue of his wit thus to transmute life into literature and literature into life.

The society of the eighteenth-century world is sharply enough, perhaps too sharply, drawn in these letters, but what of the man Horace Walpole himself? He has limned for us a whole gallery of characters with mordant brush; what of his own portrait? What is the ruling passion that impels him to play his part in this drama of human nature? "I have often said, and oftener think—" and the maxim, which he underscores, is his chief legacy to popular remembrance—"*that this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel*—a solution of why Democritus laughed and Heraclitus wept. The only gainer is History, which has constant opportunities of showing the various ways in which men can contrive to be fools and knaves. The record pretends to be written for instruction, though to this hour no mortal has been the better or wiser for it." Democritus or Heraclitus, which was he? Not precisely either, however much laughter may have predominated over tears. To the profounder thought of the age, whether speculative or political, he gave little heed; was indeed ready on all occasions to admit that these things were outside the circle of his sympathy and his powers. Nor can he be classed among those practical philosophers who hold themselves valiantly aloof from the attractions and perplexities of the day. Something of the unconcerned spectator he possessed, and towards the end of life this quality developed almost to the exclusion of all others,

but during his more active years the personal bonds were too strong to allow any such claim to a lofty indifference. To his father he preserved always a dog-like fidelity, and his theory of government was at once a form of almost passionate *pietas*, and a surrender to his own temperamental dislike of change. Other lesser fidelities held him, and he could enter the broil of faction or even tolerate the enormities of war if his cousin Conway were involved.

Life could not be quite a comedy to one as sensitive as he, yet his feelings had neither the quivering tenderness nor the austere comprehension of tragedy. It does not appear that the pathos of Richardson's novels touched him in any way; the great heart of Dr. Johnson could be deeply stirred by the pity of Clarissa's fall, but Walpole only mocked. No sentiment could be more genuine than his detestation of war. He cries out over and over again that only a monster could have started the reforms of Luther, had he foreseen their cost in bloodshed and devastation. Through all the conflicts of his own age, one feeling is constant with him: *Quidquid delirant reges plectuntur Achivi*, as he expresses it in the verse of his namesake—it is the people who pay for this national madness with their lives and their ruined homes. I see no reason to doubt the sincerity of this sentiment, yet one will look in vain to find in it any vibration of that sympathy with the fates of mankind which made Rousseau, despite his mor-

bidness and falseness, so terrible a force for good and evil.

His thought and emotions were on the lower scale of the dilettante, and tempered with the desire of ease. It is to this quality of the dilettante in life and art that he owes the almost malignant perversion of his character which the world has received from Macaulay; for what sympathy or understanding could there be between so militant a politician and one whose Whigism even, as Macaulay says with infinite scorn, "was a very harmless kind"? But Macaulay is more than unsympathetic; it would be easy to take his portrait of Walpole point by point and show that it is wantonly or ignorantly distorted. "His republicanism," says the historian, "like the courage of a bully, or the love of a fribble, was strong and ardent when there was no occasion for it, and subsided when he had an opportunity of bringing it to the proof," etc. The whole passage is an unpardonable misrepresentation. Walpole never was, properly speaking, a republican; he believed thoroughly in the British balance of powers, the constitution, so-called. He never wavered in his sympathy with the Americans, and in his admiration for Washington, believing the cause of liberty lay there; he was opposed to the French Revolution, because he thought he saw in it a new and more terrible tyranny. It is hard to see in this the part of a fribble. "Though the most Frenchified English

writer of the eighteenth century, he troubled himself little about the portents which were daily to be discerned in the French literature of his time." So writes Macaulay, doing an injustice with both turns of his paradox. The fact is that Walpole is one of the few Englishmen who saw clearly that a revolution was preparing in France, and was terrified by the prospect. And as for being Frenchified in his style ("deeply tainted with Gallicism"), the only Gallic traits one reader at least can observe, apart from a phrase now and then, are a remarkable lucidity and lightness; he ranks with the few chosen writers of England who have combined the precision of literary with the flexibility of spoken language. Macaulay sneers again at his "unwillingness to be considered a man of letters," imputes to him all the vices of authorship without any of its virtues, and accuses him of showing a lordly contempt for genius while longing himself for literary fame. "The fact is, that Walpole had the faults of Grub Street, with a large addition from St. James's Street, the vanity, the jealousy, the irritability of a man of letters, the affected superciliousness and apathy of a man of *ton*"—it is a pretty paradox after the fashion of Macaulay, and Walpole himself might envy such a gift of satire; but it has one serious defect—it is not true. The tenor of Walpole's letters on this subject is sufficiently clear, one might suppose. Again and again he deprecates any comparison of his own

writings with the work of real genius, not because he despises the trade of author, but because he is aware of his own limitations. There is, in particular, a passage in a letter written late in life to Hannah More, which sets his self-criticism in so clear a light that it may be quoted at length:

You said in your last that you feared you took up time of mine to the prejudice of the public; implying, I imagined, that I might employ it in composing. Waiving both your compliment and my own vanity, I will speak very seriously to you on the subject, and with exact truth. My simple writings have had better fortune than they had any right to expect; and I fairly believe, in a great degree, because gentlemen writers, who do not write for interest, are treated with some civility if they do not write absolute nonsense. I think so, because I have not unfrequently known much better works than mine much more neglected, if the name, fortune, and situation of the authors were below mine. I wrote early from youth, spirits, and vanity; and from both the last when the first no longer existed. I now shudder when I reflect on my own boldness; and with mortification, when I compare my own writings with those of any great authors. This is so true, that I question whether it would be possible for me to summon up courage to publish anything I have written, if I could recall time past, and should yet think as I think at present. So much for what is over and out of my power. As to writing now, I have totally forsworn the profession, for two solid reasons. One I have already told you; and it is, that I know my own writings are trifling and of no depth. The other is, that, light and futile as they were, I am sensible they are better than I could compose now. I am aware of the decay of the middling parts I had, and others may be still more sensible of it.

I doubt if Macaulay, with all his memory, could summon a single author who has showed a more wholesome understanding of his own performance, and has spoken of himself with a finer balance of modesty and pride. It is one of the curious anomalies of psychology that Macaulay should have written of the most transparent of men, both in his vanities and his excellence, as bearing features "covered by mask within mask."

One is justified, I think, in feeling something akin to indignation at these perverted charges. For my own part, I confess to a certain invincible prepossession in favour of these men of the past who have lived and written for my entertainment. There are writers who naturally arouse one's impatience—a Tolstoy, himself a compound of the humanitarian and the decadent, who cries out the Gospel of Jesus on the street-corners, a Browning who imposes on the world as a spiritual teacher, a Swinburne who mouths the great words of liberty and righteousness. Such men challenge us to take a stand on questions of fundamental veracity. But to those authors who have added so generously to our amusement without claiming our reverence—a sentimental humourist like Sterne, a babbling man of the world like Walpole—I do not see why we should feel anything but indulgence. It does not enlarge one's idea of Wordsworth's humanity to read such words as "That cold and false-hearted Frenchified coxcomb, Horace Walpole." Let alone the want of

charity in such a judgment, cold would seem to be an odd epithet to apply to a nature so quick with sensibility, and false-hearted is equally foreign to one who made a cult of friendship, however volatile he may have appeared at times.

But because we find Walpole engaging and at bottom sincere, it is not necessary to exaggerate his virtues or to raise him into a hero; he is in no possible sense *ultimus Romanorum*, as Byron called him, but very human and very crotchety. We may even go part way with Macaulay. "The conformation of his mind," says that historian, "was such that whatever was little seemed to him great, and whatever was great seemed to him little." No doubt, something of this disproportion is almost an essential ingredient of the dilettante wherever and whenever found, but in Walpole it was intensified by a certain limitation, and I think, too, honesty of temperament. He apparently suffered a kind of dread not only of the forces which might solicit his heart too eagerly, but of those also which disarranged the settled bounds of his imagination. His disposition to the few who were really close to him was considerate and generous; his interest in every topic within a certain circumscribed sphere was insatiable. These things he magnified with whimsical delight; here he was at home to quarrel and embrace at his comfort. But the great matters of the outside—popular movements, heroisms, new philosophies, discoveries of science

which appealed to the deeper springs of pity and admiration—all these disturbed him with a sense of homelessness, and no one can fully understand him who has not in some corner of his own nature this jealous love of the small and the familiar. The distant conquests of Great Britain under Chatham's administration stirred his patriotic pride, but they undeniably also gave him a feeling of uneasiness, as if the peculiar traits of the little England over which he grumbled so comfortably were disappearing in the unloved concerns of the empire. And so of the universe at large; he protests with humourous dismay against the discoveries of Herschell. No, he has not visited the gentleman's giant telescope. "In truth," he writes, "the scraps I have learnt of his discoveries have confounded me; my little head will not contain the stupendous idea of an infinity of worlds." And then, after other matters, he takes up this astronomical theme again, and passes from it to his distaste for a giant picture:

> I will return to your letter; which set me afloat on the vasty deep of speculation, to which I am very unequal and do not love. My understanding is more on a level with your ball and meditations on the destruction of Gorhambury, which I regret. . . . I called at Sir Joshua's, while he was at Ampthill, and saw his Hercules for Russia. I did not at all admire it: the principal babe put me in mind of what I read so often, but have never seen, *the monstrous craws*. Master Hercules's knees are as large as, I presume, the late Lady Guilford's. *Blind* Tiresias is *staring* with horror at the terrible spectacle.

You begin to see that this apparent trifler has his own philosophy of life, which you may like or not, as you please. "I am certainly the greatest philosopher in the world," he remarks quizzically, "without ever having thought of being so; always employed, and never busy; eager about trifles, and indifferent to everything serious. Well, if it is not philosophy, at least it is content. I am as pleased here with my own nutshell, as any monarch you have seen these two months astride his eagle." It is the philosophy least in vogue to-day, and for which in public we have the least charity, yet I suspect that in secret it has its own strange seduction for many a bewildered soul. Intellectually there comes a time when, with Walpole, we are ready to pardon professed philosophers if they would allow that their wisdom is only trifling, instead of calling their trifling wisdom. And, morally, we have our moments when we feel it is idle to try to cure the follies of the world without curing it of being foolish. The range of such a mood passes from a lofty Platonic scorn to a very Epicurean comfort of scolding, and Walpole may be found at both extremes. I doubt if Plato was one of the authors who stood on the shelves at Strawberry Hill, yet during the height of the American war Walpole breaks out in a spirit of invective which reads almost like a translation of a most famous passage in the *Republic:*

There are great moments, he exclaims, when every

man is called on to exert himself; but when folly, infatuation, delusion, incapacity, and profligacy fling a nation away, and it concurs itself, and applauds its destroyers, a man who has lent no hand to the mischief, and can neither prevent nor remedy the mass of evils, is fully justified in sitting aloof and beholding the tempest rage, with silent scorn and indignant compassion.

Add but a touch of urbanity, and you have the very note and almost the words of Plato's image of the storm of sleet and dust. But we do not go to Walpole for these heights of indignation. He is more at ease when diverting himself at the drolleries of society, and if at times the tone rises, it is oftener into that of scandal than of invective. Yes, the name is in rather bad odour, but one may as well admit that a good many of these letters deal in pure scandal. If Walpole possessed any ruling passion, it was quite as much the desire to discover the skeleton in his neighbour's closet as to fill his own closet with bric-à-brac. And he found what he sought; there is such a rattling through these pages that one feels occasionally like a modern Ezekiel strayed into the valley of dry bones. This does not imply necessarily, I think, that the observer's heart was corrupt or peevish. There is no more terrible picture in all the correspondence than Walpole's visit to his mad nephew, the third Lord Orford whom he afterwards succeeded:

The gentlemen of the country came to congratulate his recovery; yet, for more than six weeks, he would do

nothing but speak in the lowest voice, and would whisper to them at the length of the table, when the person next to him could not distinguish what he said. Every evening, precisely at the same hour, sitting round a table, he would join his forehead to his mistress's (who is forty, red-faced, and with black teeth, and with whom he has slept every night these twenty years), and there they would sit for a quarter of an hour, like two paroquets, without speaking. Every night, from seven to nine, he regularly, for the whole fortnight, made his secretary of militia, an old drunken, broken tradesman, read Statius to the whole company, though the man could not hiccup the right quantity of the syllables. Imagine what I suffered! One morning I asked the company before my Lord was up, how they found him? They answered, just as he had always been. Then, thought I, he has always been distracted.

The portraiture is sufficiently cynical, the very "flower of brimstone," yet we must remember that Walpole through the most trying circumstances had treated this poor wretch with punctilious honour and even consideration. Here is one of the anomalies of our nature: who will allow that he takes pleasure in plain scandal, yet who does not relish these letters? It is, in fact, curious that those who have criticised Walpole most severely, admit almost in the same breath the amusing qualities of his writing. Is the explanation the old one of the French moralist, that there is a certain consolation in watching the misfortunes of others, even of a friend? or is it possible to take a more moral view of this very human trait? Sometimes, while laughing at these malicious stories

of old London, an odd sensation comes over the reader that he is not one but two persons, and that the jest is on himself. All the brute in his own nature, the disgraces and follies, the coarse and evil things he cannot entirely keep out of sight, are set apart from himself in that wicked society, and in the wild hilarity of his freedom he is pelting the monster with jeers and opprobrium. So it is that we flatter ourselves, as did Walpole in his day, by making of scandal a kind of philosophy of life.

THE END

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